Diaspora Studies

India and its Diaspora: making sense of Hindu identity in South Africa

Nirmala Devi Gopal[ab], Sultan Khan[a] & Shanta Balgobind Singh[b]

[a] School of Social Science, Sociology Programme, University of
KwaZulu-Natal, 1st Floor, MTB, Howard College Campus, Mazisi
Kunene Street, Glenwood, Durban 4001, South Africa

[b] School of Applied Human Science, Criminology and Forensic
Studies Programme, University of KwaZulu-Natal, 1st Floor, MTB,
Howard College Campus, Mazisi Kunene Street, Glenwood, Durban
4001, South Africa
Published online: 16 Jan 2014.

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

India and its Diaspora: making sense of Hindu identity in South Africa

Nirmala Devi Gopal[a,b]*, Sultan Khan[a] and Shanta Balgobind Singh[b]

[a]School of Social Science, Sociology Programme, University of KwaZulu-Natal, 1st Floor, MTB, Howard College Campus, Mazisi Kunene Street, Glenwood, Durban 4001, South Africa; [b]School of Applied Human Science, Criminology and Forensic Studies Programme, University of KwaZulu-Natal, 1st Floor, MTB, Howard College Campus, Mazisi Kunene Street, Glenwood, Durban 4001, South Africa

Indian immigrants to South Africa in the late nineteenth century differed in terms of their origins, motivations, belief systems, customs, and practices from the indigenous African population as well as from the ruling white settler elite. It is within this context that this paper interrogates some of the ways in which several generations of (Indian) Hindus constructed and continue to (re)construct their religious identities in South Africa. Data for this study were achieved by administering face-to-face questionnaires to 66 individuals in the Metropolitan Area of Durban in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The sample (selected through snowball sampling) comprised third to fifth generation Indians belonging to the four major language groups (Tamil, Telegu, Gujarati, and Hindi) residing in South Africa. Following the questionnaire responses, interviews were conducted with a selected number of respondents from the same sample. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS while analysis of qualitative data followed a thematic model.

Keywords: India; Diaspora; South Africa; identity; religion; Hinduism

Introduction

In 2004, Landy, Maharaj, and Mainet-Valleix argued that though "Indian" identity was alive in Durban, it was fragmented according to generation, religion, language, and class, and that India was a key referent "transcendentally" since it only has an abstract existence, which is spoken of, dreamt of, and sometimes visited, but always as a whole since the region of one's ancestors is almost never at the forefront. In a similar vein, Bhana argues that people of Indian origin (PIO) have lost much of their ancestral legacy as they became "South Africans", with English the dominant language for almost all of the 1.2 million Indians.

Sooklal (1991), in his work on Hinduism and politics in South Africa, argues that the Hindu faith developed in a non-Indian context in which its adherents adapted to South African conditions. The key question, according to Sooklal, is, "In a country made up of African majorities, what did it mean for a Hindu to identify himself as a South African?". The work of Chetty (1999) responds to this question by maintaining that religion is one of the most pervasive ways in which people of Indian descent in South Africa identify themselves. Unsurprisingly, notwithstanding the almost organic acculturation process that Hindus have undergone, they continue to draw upon Hindu teachings and practices emanating from India. India is perceived as the ultimate source of authority

---

*Corresponding author. Email: gopal@ukzn.ac.za

for religious practices and identity. For example, Tamils among them draw upon the *Tirukkural*, a master-piece written in the first century B.C.E., as part of their religious practice, and sing hymns drawn from the *Tevaram*. Other groups of Hindus, whose ancestors came from Gujarat or from the densely populated regions of the Ganges valley, also draw from their ancestral texts.

Sooklal argues that apartheid affected Hindus because the institutional structure of Hinduism was dependent on the joint family for the perpetuation of its religious value system. The Group Areas Act of 1950 shaped the political landscape of Black South Africans. Sooklal (1991) blames the Group Areas Act for disrupting and disintegrating Hindu family life. The break-up of the joint family unit had a profound effect on the Hindu community in particular. The functional impli-cations of the break-down of the joint or extended family system are extensive from a religious viewpoint since one of the most important contexts for learning the Hindu religious culture is the home or family unit, where children are taught by example and through story telling by their parents and relatives. Ritual practices are possibly learned by imitating elders in the joint family.

According to Statistics, South Africa (2011) Indians make up approximately 1.3 million or 2.7% of the country's population. According to the 2001 census statistics (Statistics South Africa Census 2001[1]), there were 551,669 Hindus in South Africa, roughly 1.22% of the country's population, most of whom are concentrated in KwaZulu-Natal. These figures may be an under-estimation since there has been large-scale movement of migrants from the Indian sub-continent in the post-apartheid period, some of whom are illegally residing in the country; hence they are not recorded in the census statistics. It may be of interest to note that data on religion was, for the first time in the country's history, omitted from the 2011 census (Statistics South Africa 2011).

Indians in South Africa are made up of four linguistic groups – Telugu, Hindi, Tamil, and Gujarati. Around 80% live in KwaZulu-Natal, with the major concentration being in Durban where most of the indentured and their descendants initially settled. With the relocation arising from the Group Areas Act, Indians from Indian townships such as Chatsworth Phoenix, Tongaat, Mount Edgecombe, Stanger, and Umzinto, along the north and south coasts, Pietermar-itzburg, the capital of KwaZulu-Natal and in the midlands and northern Natal, Ladysmith, New-castle, Dundee, and Glencoe were established. This relocation socially reproduced the Indian *Diaspora* and enforced racial divisions through forced removals and settlement into racially designated human settlements.

Methodology

This study is based on face-to-face interviews conducted with 66 participants representing the four major linguistic groups within the Hindu faith in the Durban metropolis in KwaZulu-Natal. Participants were selected through snowball sampling across the metropolitan area of Durban. There were 21 males aged between 18 and 55 and 39 females aged between 18 and 55, respectively. Considering the sensitivity of the study, the snowball sampling technique was used so that it provided participants the freedom to participate in the study. Interviews were conducted at a mutually arranged venue and each interview lasted on average one hour. All inter-views were conducted in English. Since participation in the study was dependent on availability and willingness, the study may exclude unintentionally those with divergent approaches or experiences. This study is about individual South African Hindus in the first instance, but is an exploration of their discursive positioning in relation to Hinduism as a religious community.

Questions were facilitated by a structured interview schedule which focused on issues regard-ing their understanding of Hinduism, and how Hinduism has or has not evolved since the first indentured Indians arrived in South Africa 153 years ago. Interviews took a conversational form with all participants sharing information with great enthusiasm. The quantitative aspects of the interview schedule were analysed using SPSS statistical software. Utilising a working

model of thematic analysis, qualitative data were analysed through a step-by-step procedure which began by searching through the transcripts of the interviews for repeated patterns of meaning (Braun and Clarke 2006, quoted in Gopal 2013). It is critical to note that this study on Hinduism and identity in South Africa focuses on the nature, extent and form of religious identities which provide a basis for analysing the depth or otherwise on the prevalence of religiosity within the study cohort. Data were analysed first using primary analysis in which each of the responses of the questions was examined and the implications thereof presented where they indicated some trend or fact that was of interest.

The demographic profile of respondents based on gender, age, educational level, and marital status is presented in Table 1. It may be noted that only about a third (36.4%) of the respondents were males compared to females who constituted 63.6% of the study sample. The overwhelming participation of female respondents in the study sample is not atypical since for many years most religious functions, excluding those performed by priests, and was primarily initiated in the home by women (Naidoo 1985). Hence the large response rate from female respondents in the study attests to the role of females within the Hindu family system who maintain the religious value system of the faith and explains the indifference of men to engage with the study.

The majority of respondents (60.9%) in this study are youthful, with ages ranging from 18 to 34 years. This is not unusual since the South African population is considered youthful and the official definition of a youth extends to age 35. This finding suggests that a significant majority of respondents in the study shall be considered either third or fourth generation South African Hindus whose perceptions provide a different insight into the contemporary status of the religion in its different facets and forms in the country. Insofar as the marital status of respondents is concerned, just more than a third (34.4%) of the respondents were married as compared to almost half (48.4%) who were single. A relatively small percentage (3.1%) of the respondents was divorced, as compared to 12.5% who were deserted by their spouses and 1.6% who had separated. This can be interpreted as indicating that 17.2% of the sample of respondents had experienced some form of family

Table 1. Demographic profile of respondents.

Variable		Percent
Gender	Male	36.4
	Female	63.6
Age	51–55	3
	54–50	10.6
	49–45	6.1
	44–40	9.1
	39–35	10.6
	34–30	7.6
	29–25	19.7
	<24	33.3
Education level achieved	Primary	40.6
	Secondary	7.8
	Tertiary	37.5
	Other[a]	14.1
Marital status	Married	34.4
	Divorced	3.1
	Separated	1.6
	Deserted	12.5
	Single	48.4

[a]Other in educational level represents either no responses or those who did not complete primary school education.

instability. The study by Singh and Harisunker (2010, 41) on marriage and family highlights the role of the family structure as an important reference point for guidance on what to do and how to conduct rituals within the Hindu family system. Hence with such high levels of family dysfunction, the future stability of the Hindu family system as a primary agent of religious socialisation is brought into question, with implications for the religious identities of future generations.

From this brief demographic tapestry of the study sample, it should be noted that at least half (48.4%) of the sample population is single and the proportion of failed marriages would suggest high rates of marital instability. Broadly, the sample population is youthful and as such their responses as contemporary Hindus in South Africa should provide a reliable insight on their religious identity. The sections to follow will provide more insight into the respondents' sense of religious identity.

The study population comprised respondents with a wide range of educational backgrounds, which provides a diverse set of responses for analytical purposes. Two-fifths (40.6%) of the respondents in the study had achieved only primary levels of education. Such a large percentage is again reflective of the poor socio-economic conditions of the older generation and the poor education system that Hindus were exposed to under apartheid. On the other extreme, there was a significant percentage (37.5%) that advanced to tertiary education. This suggests the importance placed within the community for secular forms of education. For a relatively small percentage (7.8%) of respondents, their highest level achieved was secondary schooling, suggesting that most of those who completed secondary schooling went on to tertiary institutions. Cumulatively, such extremities in the levels of education (primary and tertiary) are not atypical of the broader South African socio-economic landscape, which is characterised by huge gaps between the haves and have nots.

Before proceeding to a discussion of the findings, this paper provides a historical background which will assist in understanding and contextualising the present situation.

Historical background: Hinduism in South Africa

Racist policies and practices disenfranchised PIO in South Africa (the area that became South Africa when the Union was formed in 1910) for exactly 123 years following their arrival in 1860. When the Union was proclaimed in 1910, they were classified as second-class citizens as it was the official policy of the government to repatriate them to India. It was only in 1961 that the apartheid government which came to power in 1948 finally accepted that Indians would not be returning en masse to India and PIOs were formally incorporated into the South African citizenship category.

The bulk of South Africa's Indian population came as indentured immigrants. Between 1860 and 1911, just over 150,000 immigrants came as indentured migrants. They were followed by migrants who came on their own volition, and who were known as "passenger" because of this. There were important regional, ethnic, language, and class differences between Indian migrants. "Passengers" were mostly from the western part of India (Gujarat) and were involved in retail trade or as shop assistants, accountants, and teachers. Most maintained endogamy by visiting their villages of origin and marrying women from "back home". The indentured, on the other hand, spoke Tamil, Telegu, and Hindi, married in Natal and thus subject to constraints which meant that they often had to marry out of their caste.

Migration overseas was not an easy decision for Hindus. There was concern about being "polluted" by mixing with "outsiders" as well as by losing the Hindu relationship with the sacred geography of India, with its gods, goddesses, holy rivers, and places of pilgrimage. There was an "emotional and ritual attachment to this landscape" (Warrier 2008, 89). Despite these concerns and the rigours of indentured labour, organised religion began to take form from the beginning.

This organisation was most profound between the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century amongst both the diverse groupings of Hindus, who made up 85% of the indentured population, as well as amongst Muslims, who constituted about 12% of the indentured population. Desai and Vahed (2007) observe that, despite attempts by reformers over the years "to force Hinduism into a narrow conceptual framework", it continues to remain a loosely knit tradition with a variety of beliefs and practices' in contemporary South Africa.

Hindus had a distinct presence in the country through its temple culture which promoted basic principles of the faith in the early years of its evolution, at the turn of the twentieth century there were many Hindu religious leaders from the Indian sub-continent visiting South Africa and providing discourse on Hindu ideals, practices, customs, and traditions as practised in their native homeland. Some promoted a sectarian form of Hinduism, whilst others advocated a reformist brand.

Most of the religious leaders that visited South Africa subscribed to the AryaSamaj[2] sect of the faith. One of the consequences of this was the establishment of the South African Hindu MahaSabha (SAHMS)[3] in 1912, an overarching body for Hindus throughout the country. However, it must be stressed that this was an elite organisation and that the majority of Hindus continued subscribing to various practices that they had carried with them from their former homeland and which were passed down mainly through oral traditions (Vahed 2013).

From the 1920 onwards, Hindu priests did begin to arrive in South Africa and this helped to consolidate some of the some of the rituals, festivals, traditions, beliefs, and practices in a more formal way. Brain (1990) suggests that these priests helped Hindus to establish themselves around common religious practices, and that these instilled a sense of belonging to a wider faith community globally. Together with educated and business elites, they also helped to form numerous Hindu institutions. While this, on the one hand, helped to make permanent the Hindu presence in the country, it also led to a greater awareness of one's own practices and how these may be distinguished from the beliefs and practices of others.

The construction of temples in the twentieth century provided an overt expression of the presence of Hinduism in South Africa as well as some of the differences. Khan (2013) observes that religious associational life was formalised around places of worship in the form of temples. Temples built later were a departure from the early temples, which were set up under the shade of a tree or near a river. Early temples were created from images constructed from historical memory of prayer sites by indentured Indians as well as by temple builders who had manuals called *silpashastra*, but by the mid-twentieth century elaborate temple structures dotted the religious landscape.

Despite the overt expression of their faith, Desai and Vahed (2007) maintain that Hindus were regarded as "heathens" by the Whites in Natal. Such religious ostracism is attested to during the solemnisation of weddings as the marriage certificate listed their religion as "heathen". But Hindus and Muslims proved much more resilient than the Christian missionaries anticipated as constant proselytisation did not harvest the energies invested. By and large, indentured Indians resisted attempts by Christian missionaries to "save" them from moral degeneration by preserving their faith. This entailed making great sacrifices to create conditions for the advancement of their perceived "heathenism"; these involved both song and dance as much as it involved institutions for their religious self-preservation.

South African Hindus, like their counterparts in India, perform various domestic rituals on different occasions. These differ from one linguistic group to another and have, of course, changed over time. From our interaction with Hindus, we noted that most Hindi-speaking Hindus perform daily rituals such as *sandhya* (offering *puja* to one's own deity, often to Surya, the sun), lighting a lamp in the house in front of the image of a deity, or in front of the *Jhanda* (flag). In more traditional Hindi-speaking homes, daily rituals are meticulously followed.[4] *Sandhya* prayers are also found among the Tamil sect of the Hindu faith. Most Tamils light a

lamp called *kamakshi* (or popularly known among the Tamils as "God Lamp").[5] The Telugu community more or less follows the same pattern as the Tamils. The Gujarati community also follows the lighting of the lamp in the morning as a sacrosanct ritual.

There have been great changes amongst Hindus since the 1960s. One is the arrival of reformist Hindu movements such as the Divine Life Society, Ramakrishna Centre, Krishna Consciousness Movement, and the Saiva Sithantha Sungum. These movements, in general, are characterised by the reading and deep study of religious scripture; communal religious services (*satsang*); avoidance of trance festivals such as fire-walking and Kavadi; as well as an emphasis on inner spirituality through practices such as yoga and meditation (Diesel and Maxwell 1993, 63).

However, over time as Hindus of Indian origin have settled into their host country in the past two decades, there has been an increasing trend towards conversion to Christianity, particularly among Hindus of South Indian origin. Chetty (1999) reports on conversion to Christianity as a serious challenge for Hindus. The local priest that she interviewed stated that

> in India getting converted – crossing over to Christianity from Hinduism is not easily done – not easily adapted – not easily practised. Very few people – they cross over from Hinduism to Christianity. But in this country – easily they are converted … I never heard in this country a Christian man coming to Hinduism but I very regularly hear of Hindu people – they are regularly going to Christianity.

Ojong (2012) concludes in her study of conversion:

> Informants converted from Hinduism to Christianity for a host of reasons, which included feelings of being trapped in a caste hierarchy, illness, poverty, and other social problems. Conversion seemed to offer informants a means to escape poverty and deprivation. The inability of practicing Hindus in South Africa to understand why some of their fellow co-religionists convert has led to a simplistic explanation that converts were people who had failed to understand the true nature of Hinduism and, being ignorant of their culture, did not merit a place in the "Indian" community. Conversion is not due only to caste prejudice and is also not just a matter of changing religious beliefs. It is due to a host of factors and results in a far-reaching transformation of habits and behaviour.

Despite being in South Africa for over a century and half, caste has always been a feature of Hindu society in South Africa. Caste has not been static. In the South African case, there has been a dissolution of sub caste (jati) identities which "has given rise to various other formations of groups replacing the endogamous relationships with other arbitrary group formations" (Kumar 2012, 10). Caste now serves not as a rigid hierarchical system but a

> … fluid structure that offers some sense of superiority of social status, however much it might be limited. More to the point, I would suggest that caste consciousness [of a superior status] is more significant than actual caste maintenance in real society. It is this consciousness that seems to tempt social groups and individuals to either display their caste name as part of their last name or discreetly acquire caste names if they came from a lower order caste groups. [This] offers an example of how caste might transmute itself into modern forms without its traditional core elements … . Caste in today is more to do with the symbolic consciousness of being superior than it is about maintaining strictly one's caste endogamy. (13)

Discussion of findings

Form and frequency of worship as affirmation of religious identity

Hinduism is not a monotheistic religion and its adherents believe God to be formless, but worshipped in every form (Ravishankar 2002). The underlying presupposition in Hinduism is the presence of God in nature. And since everything is a manifestation of the divine, it is left to the particular individual or community to select a preferred God. This helps to explain the
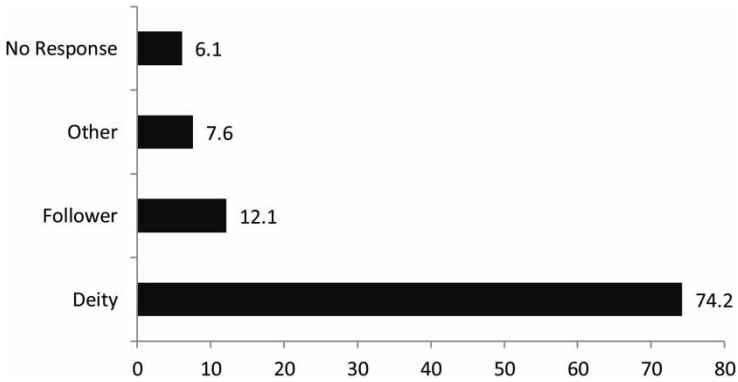
Figure 1.   Form of religious worship.

tolerance which Hinduism shows towards other religious beliefs and practices (Griswold 1912). This appears to hold true in our study as almost three-quarters (74.2%) of the respondents express their spiritual needs through the worship of various deities as depicted in Figure 1. Such deities include Mother Kali, Lord Muruga, Lord Ganesha, and Lord Krishna.

Only a small percentage (12.1%) of respondents expressed their religious identity by following religious leaders in the form of priests (gurus) who provide spiritual guidance. These gurus include Swamis. The fact that an overwhelming number of respondents express their religious identity through the worship of deities, suggests an adherence to one or the other of the sacred Hindu Gods and Goddesses as the major form of worship.

Frequency of religious worship

It may be noted from Figure 2 that (85%) of respondents in the sample population pray daily which suggests a strong religiosity. This suggests that within the sample population, there is a strong commitment to religious worship and that conformity to the Hindu belief and practices is sustained. Follow-up discussions with a few of the respondents suggested that they pray more regularly now than they did growing up or even their parents. Most respondents pray daily at home in either a shrine or a special place of worship set up exclusively for prayer purposes. Prayer at temples is usually during special religious festivals, for example, Ganesha
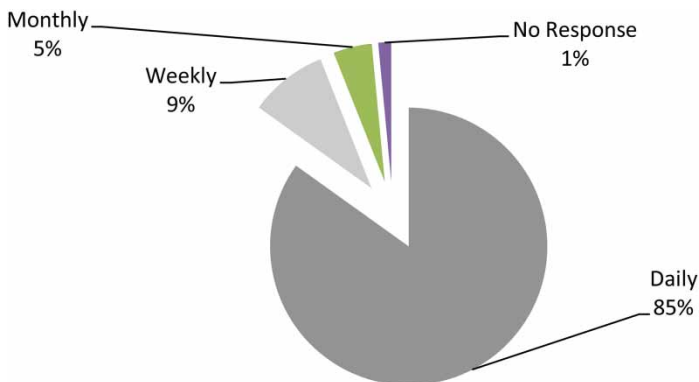

Figure 2.   Frequency of religious worship.

Chaturthy, Raam Noami, Vinayagar Chaturthy, etc. Most respondents pray in their special prayer spaces either in the morning or in the evening. In the past, when Indians were allowed to build places of worship, they established temples and mosques. As they were a literate people with books of religion, philosophy, songs, prayers, poems, and moral codes, they had the means to keep their customs and beliefs more or less intact. They established vernacular schools, taught children to read and write, and had them memorise the wisdom contained in sacred and other literature. In the 1940s, Indian films brought the great stories of the Mahabharata, the Ramayana, and the Moghul Empire to life in Indian cinemas. Movement between India and South Africa also helped to keep Indian traditions alive. People returned to India to refresh themselves in the practice of Indian customs and traditions and many Indian scholars, musicians and dancers were invited to South Africa to share their knowledge and skills (Naidoo 2011, 1).

Associational life and religious identity amongst respondents

Given heightened frequency of religious worship amongst the sample population, whether at the individual or the associational level through places of worship, it is not surprising that adherents to the faith displayed a deep interest in sustaining their belief by participating in the activities and programmes of religious organisations of their choice.

This is illustrated in Figure 3 which shows that 80.3% of respondents in the sample population are members of some form of religious organisation, whilst 86.4% engage with religious texts, either at an individual level or through the respective religious organisation of which they are members. Some of these organisations are the Sai organisations, Dravida society of South Africa, Andhra Maha Sabha, and the Swami Ayappan Group etc. These groups are usually organised along linguistic groups. They congregate on a weekly basis at a specific venue where they sing bhajans and deliver religious discourses. With such high levels of association with religious organisational life and engagement with divine texts, the finding suggests that within this study cohort these two variables are important determinants in the formation of religious identity.

This finding also suggests that the Hindu diasporic community draws its religious identity through affiliation to organised forms of worship, while variances exist in diverse religious schools of thought. The fact that engagement with religious texts such as Tirrukural, Ramayana, and Bhagavad-Gita scores a high percentage amongst the sample population that strongly suggests individual commitment to developing a sense of religious identity through
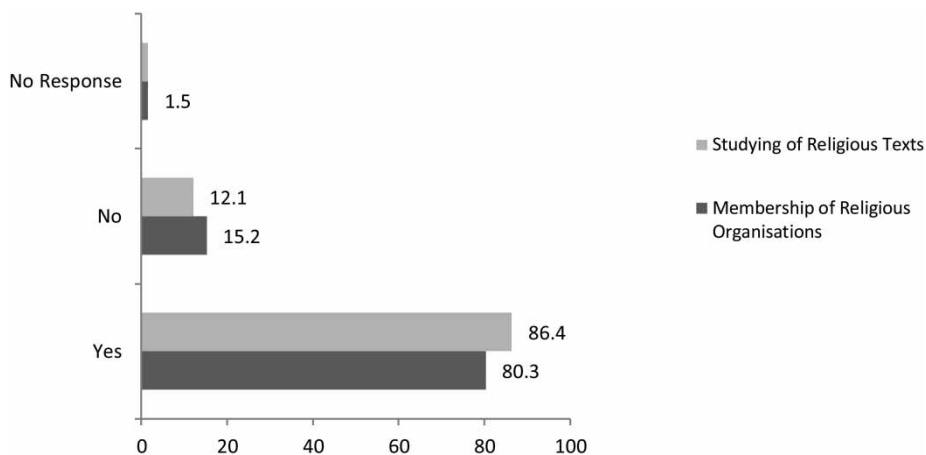

Figure 3.   Membership of religious organisations and study of religious texts.

"authoritative" guidance derived from divine texts. It also affirms that the respondents are not totally dependent on their religious knowledge and understanding derived from conventional sources of religious and spiritual enlightenment provided for by priests, sages, gurus, or Brahmins who traditionally have been perceived to be the custodians of religious knowledge and guidance to their respective congregations.

Some of the organisations that respondents are members of are South African Tamil Federation, Andhra MahaSabha, Brahma Kumaris Raja Yoga Centre, Divine Life Society of South Africa, Gujarati Maha Parishad, Hindu MahaSabha, International Society for Krishna Consciousness, Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa, Shree Sanathan Dharma Sabha of South Africa, and the Vedanta Mission.

Identity sustaining indicators amongst respondents

Although religious associational life plays an important role in shaping religious identity, compared to identity sustaining indicators amongst the study respondents provide conflicting results. It will be noted from Table 2 that, whilst a significant number of respondents (78.8%) affirmed being proud of the Hindu faith, 75.8% at some point felt embarrassed to claim their identity, whereas more than half (58.3%) considered converting to other faiths. This last finding is important, given the high levels of conversion to Christianity and indicates that Hindu leaders and priests, if they are concerned about this trend, need to engage with ordinary Hindus to establish the reasons and remedial measures that they could take. The fact that 75.8% of respondents were at some point "embarrassed to claim Hindu identity", may be attributed to the ambiguity of the question as the study did not probe when and in what context this happened. Perhaps a qualitative investigation may indicate that there is no discrepancy between being a proud Hindu and sometimes being embarrassed to claim the Hindu faith. For example, one could feel embarrassed after obnoxious behaviour on the part of fellow-believers, which does not detract from one's own beliefs.

Despite the possible inconsistency in the identity indicators in the religious beliefs of respondents, there appears to be a strong indication that religious traditions and festivals play an important source in sustaining religious identity. The practice of religious traditions (religious vigil,[6] holy nights,[7] prescriptive rituals etc.) and festivals (Deepavali, Kavady, etc.), are all occasioned by large attendance which fosters a sense of religious community, solidarity, and communal activity.

There are various festivals celebrated throughout the year in South Africa. Some of these are the Festival of Chariots (usually celebrated around the Easter weekend in March/April); Holika Dahan celebrated in March and Deepavali (Maha Luxmi Pooja) observed by Hindus. During the festival of Deepavali, lamps are lit to symbolise the victory of light over darkness and knowledge over ignorance.

Table 2. Distribution of religious identity sustaining indicators.

	Yes	No	No response	Total percent
Proud being a Hindu	78.8	21.2	0	100
Ever embarrassed to claim Hindu identity	75.6	21.1	3.3	100
Ever consider to convert to other faith	58.3	27.8	13.9	100
Is your social group to be Hindu	72.7	27.3	0	100
Importance attached to following traditions	71.2	28.8	0	100
Importance of Hindu festivals	71.2	28.8	0	100

Values attached to belief structure

In order to test the perception of respondents in respect of the values that they value as contained in their belief structure, a simple question phrased as "If you had to mention one special aspect of Hinduism, what would it be?" elicited a wide range of responses. Respondents all in the South African diasporic context expressed the following individual comments:

- tolerance towards other faiths
- promotes love
- inculcates values of harmonious existence
- embodies the principles of peace
- diversity of practices and not rigid like monotheistic religions
- instils important family values due to rituals and religious practices
- it transcends class statuses.

As the above responses suggest, there were a range of factors that made Hinduism special for respondents – tolerance, diversity, love, harmony, peace, non-class thinking, and openness. These responses are contrary to those cited by Khan from research undertaken by Schoombee and Mantzaris (1985) and Hoffmeyer, which asserted that during the apartheid era, Westernisation amongst the South African Indian Diaspora of all faith groups was a source of "emancipation" from their religious belief system. It would appear from this finding that in the post-apartheid period, a reaffirmation of religious identity is emerging amongst the fourth and fifth generation Hindus. This may be attributed to many reasons – the political, social, and economic integration of South Africa and India; the free movement of South African Indians to the land of "origin"; the role of organised religion based on different linguistic groups, access to religious literature in the language of the devotees; and anxiety resulting from the end of apartheid and the onset of globalisation.

This is an area that requires further investigation among South African Hindus. On a global scale what can be said is that while classical social thinkers believed that religion would disappear from modern life, hence the title of Sigmund Freud's work *The Future of an Illusion*, it is clear that religion remains alive and an important part of social life in most parts of the world. The secularisation has not quite panned out as predicted.

Hindus and westernisation

On the question of whether South African Hindus have become "westernised", only a third of the respondents felt strongly that this was the case. This appears to be a relatively low figure as there were complaints by religious and community leaders of Hindus becoming "westernised" from the 1960s. This finding also does not appear to corroborate the earlier response which showed that the vast majority subscribed to the basic tenets and principles underlying the faith. It may be argued that the reason for this divergence is that "westernisation" or "modernity" is a contested concept that means different things to different people, as seen in the responses below:

- "our dress code and language has changed";
- "bad habits such as drinking, smoking, pregnancy before marriage";
- "religion is becoming commercialised and especially the traditional dress and attire";
- "one is ashamed and drift away from traditions".

There are different notions and understanding of what it is to be Westernised or modern. For some, it is about language, for others dress, and yet others may see it in religious practices and the strength of one's faith.

One respondent perhaps appropriately stated that Hinduism is "fluid and socially constructed and therefore it is constantly changing". For this respondent, Hinduism does not have rigid boundaries and is open to change, adaptation, and co-existence with other religious, cultural, and social influences without losing the essence of the belief structure.

Youth and religion

The question of whether South African youth are significantly involved in promoting religion, the response was mixed. There were some negative responses:

- "many are ashamed"
- "they lack interest"
- "not sufficiently"
- "the younger generation is westernising and they feel that they will be judged by their friends"
- "most of them disregard religion and treat it as a mission they have to complete just because their parents want them too"
- "No, youngsters nowadays have better things to do and prefer socialising rather than promoting religion".

On the other hand, the study also elicited positive responses:

- "yes many South African Hindu youngsters are involved in promoting religion"
- "I have witnessed many young Hindus promoting their culture and religion and involved in many organisations"
- "most religions have youth groups which allows youngsters to promote their religion"
- "most youngsters are very involved as we have religious groups in my area and children are taught about Hinduism"
- "many boys are taught to become priests at a young age"

These responses suggest that a segment of the present generation of Hindu youth in South Africa display positive affinity for their religion. However, such a finding needs to be treated with caution as the study did not correlated the perceptions of youth religiosity with other variables such as educational levels. What was also evident is that younger people are searching for a religion that has a lot of reflection, is logical, and rational and not just one that is ritualistic and based on blind faith (Maharaj 2013, 95).

Considering that religious associational life within the South African Hindu *Diaspora* has become more institutionalised since the dark days of apartheid, these associations are more likely to reach out to the present and younger generation of youth. Conversely, in democratic South Africa, Indian languages are no longer taught at the school level and are regarded as a private matter. Hence the role of organised religion through youth programmes and projects appears to compensate for the elimination of Indian languages from the public schooling system. Hence, it may be asserted that the elimination of the Hindu language within the public schooling system was replaced by a much wider sense of religious identity through programmes and projects that provided greater insight into the religion beyond linguistics which is not a sole identifier of the degree of religiosity prevalent within the community vacuum left behind within the public schooling system.

One of the active Hindu Youth Organisations is the National Hindu Youth Federation (NHYF) of South Africa which consists of five forums that focus on religion, culture, politics, economics,

and education. Through the above forums, the NHYF embarks on a variety of activities of interest to the youth. These activities include, the fostering of communication and working with various youth and other organisations, attending of ecological conferences, hosting of educational conferences and workshops, participating in health, political, social, and other forums. It is through these initiatives that the NHYF has emerged as the most potent and dynamic Hindu youth organisation in the country. Given the diverse cultures and population groups in South Africa, the NHYF is committed to "Unity in Diversity".

Conclusion

This paper highlights the evolution of the Hindu Diaspora in South Africa against the political constraints imposed by British colonialism, the segregation policies of successive white minority governments in the first half of the twentieth century, the era of apartheid from 1948 to 1994, and the post-1994 era of non-racialism, a period spanning 154 years since the first Indians arrived in 1860. The early history of Hindus and attempts at preserving their identity was largely sustained within the folds of the extended family and by temples and learned religious figures originating from India. Despite the challenges posed by this movement to a strange land, Hindus were able to establish their religious practices and, gradually, institutions.

Urbanisation and the expansion of schools in the 1960s meant that the third generation of PIOs had greater exposure to secular Christian National Education and Western culture. The curriculum was designed to promote Western ideals. A process of acculturation took place with PIOs embracing Western lifestyles in terms of dress, language, choice of music and movies, and so on. Notwithstanding the disruption of their belief system through Western teaching modalities in the disguise of modernity, Hindus re-invigorated their sense of religious identity by reconstructing their religious spaces through associational life under trying circumstances.

In the post-apartheid South Africa, with the re-integration of the country on the global stage, contact with their ancestral land enjoyed resurgence. Many Hindus are looking for their roots in their native land, a significant number of who are making visits to religious sites in the sub-continent. Those that cannot afford to make such religious journeys are holding onto their belief system through localised associational religious life identity.

The paper, although exploratory, suggests that those who were interviewed displayed a strong commitment to the fundamental belief structure of Hinduism for their sense of identity. However, this is not to engage in myth-making and suggest that those concerned about the long-term prospects of the Hindu faith can be complacent. Conversion to Christianity and the high percentage of those who considered conversions to Christianity suggests that this is an area that needs analysis and further examination.

Notes

1. According to Statistics South Africa the Census 2001 provided the most recent national statistics for religious denominations. However, the Census 2011 did not include enumeration on religious affiliation of South Africans religious but the question has been asked in the General Household Survey, which is due to be released later this year (2013). Also a 2012 poll indicated that the number of South Africans who consider themselves religious decreased from 83% of the population in 2005 to 64% of the population in 2012 suggesting a 19% decline in religious affiliation or taking on or subscribing to such identities

2. AryaSamaj (*Sanskrit:* "Society of Nobles") is a vigorous reform sect of modern Hinduism founded in 1875 by Dayananda Sarasvati whose aim was to re-establish the Vedas, the earliest Hindu scriptures, as revealed truth. He rejected all later accretions to the Vedas as degenerate but, in his own interpretation, included much post-Vedic thought, such as the doctrines of *karma* (effect of past deeds) and of rebirth.

3.   The SAHMS is a faith-based organisation. An underlying mission of the MahaSabha is to contribute to good relations between Hindus and all other communities or sectors at local, national, and international levels towards sound nation building. The aspiration of the MahaSabha is to promote the Hindu Dharma through observing the best principles of the Hindu religion, philosophy, values, and culture according to the highest tenets of teachings.
4.   In such homes, worship of Siva is followed on Monday's, Hanuman worship on Tuesday, Wednesday is an open day for any deity, on Thursday Sarasvati and others, and on Friday Lakshmi is worshipped.
5.   This lighting of the lamp is undertaken both in the morning and in the evening. Usually a range of deities, namely Ganesha, Siva, Murugan, Lakshmi, and Sarasvati are invoked at these daily rituals.
6.   A religious vigil is a period of intentional wakefulness set aside for religious contemplation, prayer, and other devotional activities. Many cultures have some sort of vigil tradition in their religious beliefs, suggesting that the idea of staying awake for religious observances is appealing to many people, regardless as to their cultural background. The idea of the vigil has also been adopted in some communities to refer to any period of time specifically set aside for contemplation and watchfulness, whether or not it requires staying awake at unusual times.
7.   Holy nights, for example, MahaSivaratri is the great night of Shiva. Followers of Shiva observe religious fasting and the offering of Bael (Bilva) leaves to the Shiva.

Notes on contributors

Nirmala Devi Gopal is Senior Lecturer in the School of Applied Human Sciences, Programme of Criminology and Forensic Studies. My focus areas of research are youth and drugs and school violence.

Sultan Khan is Associate Professor in the School of Science and teaches social issues, urban sociology and contemporary sociological theory. His current research focus is on safer cities.

Shanta Balgobind Singh is Associate Professor in the School of Applied Human Sciences, Programme of Criminology and Forensic Studies. My focus areas of research are prisons, women and domestic violence, youth and offending and the Indian Diaspora in the twenty-first century.

References

Brain, J. B. 1990. "Religion, Missionaries and Indentured Indians." In *Essays on Indentured Indians in Natal*, edited by S. Bhana, 211–214. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press.

Braun, V., and V. Clark. 2006. "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology." *Qualitative research in Psychology* 3 (2): 77–101.

Chetty, S. 1999. "The Creation of South African Indian Identity in Natal in Relation to Hinduism." Honours diss., University of Natal, Durban.

Desai, A., and G. Vahed. 2007. *Inside Indenture – A South African Story, 1860–1914*. Durban: Madiba.

Diesel, A., and P. Maxwell. 1993. *Hinduism in Natal*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.

Gopal, N. D. 2013. "Music, Trance and Dance in the Thaipusam Kavady Festival: Reflections of a Select Group of South Africans." *Journal of Sociology Social Anthropology* 4 (1–2): 159–166.

Griswold, H. D. 1912. "Some Characteristics of Hinduism as a Religion." *Biblical World* 40 (3): 163–172.

Khan, S. 2013. "Religious Co-existence: Tolerance and Contestation amongst Hindu and Muslim Faith Groups of Indian Origin in South Africa." *Journal of Sociology Social Anthropology* 4 (1–2): 149–157.

Kumar, P. P. 2012. "Place of Subcaste (jati) Identity in the Discourse on Caste: Examination of Caste in the Diaspora." *South Asian Diaspora* 4 (2): 215–228.

Landy, F., B. Maharaj, and H. Mainet-Valleix. 2004. "Are People of Indian Origin (PIO) 'Indian'? A Case Study of South Africa." *Geoforum* 35 (2): 203–215.

Maharaj, Brij. 2013. "Challenges Facing Hindus and Hinduism in Post-apartheid South Africa." *Journal of Sociology and Social Anthropology* 4 (1–2): 93–103.

Naidoo, T. 1985. "Hindu Religion and the Family." Proceedings of a Conference arranged by Department of Social Work, University of Durban-Westville, March 25–26.

Naidoo, M. 2011. *INDIANNESS*. Published Books, Plays, Poems and Articles. 17 July. Accessed May 5, 2013. www.INDIANNESS.htm

Ojong, V. B. 2012. "Indianness and Christianity Negotiating Identity/Cultural Values in the Context of Religious Conversion Among South African Indians Living in Chatsworth, South Africa." *The Oriental Anthropologist* 12 (2): 431–444.

Ravishankar, S. 2002. *Hinduism and Islam: The Common Thread*. Bangalore: Vyakti Vikas Kendra.

Schoombee, G. F., and E. A. Mantzaris. 1985. "Attitudes of South African Indians towards Westernization and its Effects on Their Family Life". Proceedings a conference arranged by the department of social work, University of Durban- Westville, March 25–26.

Singh, A., and N. Harisunker. 2010. "Women in Durban, South Africa: Family and Marriage as Anchorage for Change." *Journal of Social Science* 25 (1–2–3): 39–50.

Sooklal, A. 1991. "A Hindu on Apartheid." *International Journal on World Peace* 8 (2): 81–86. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20751686

Statistics South Africa. 2001. *Census 2001: Statistics South Africa*. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa. p. 194. ISBN 0-621-34320-X

Vahed, G. 2013. "Institutional Hinduism: The Founding of the South African Hindu Maha Sabha, 1912." *Journal of Sociology and Social Anthropology* 4 (1–2): 17–29.

Warrier, Marya. 2008. "Diaspora." In *Studying Hinduism. Key Concepts and Methods*, edited by Sushila Mittal and Gene Thursby, 89. London: Routledge.