

**South African Hindu Maha Sabha:
(Re) Making Hinduism in South Africa, 1912-1960**

Karthigasen Gopalan

*Department of Historical Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa
E-mail: 205517849@stu.ukzn.ac.za*

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ABSTRACT This article examines the South African Hindu Maha Sabha from its inception in 1912 until 1960, when the centenary of the arrival of Indians in South Africa was celebrated by the body. Established to unite all local Hindus and create a unitary Hindu identity, the Maha Sabha experienced long periods of inactivity during its early years. While its leaders and visiting Hindu missionaries stressed the importance of uniting Hindus under one banner, South African Hindus were a heterogeneous group who partook in a wide variety of diverging religious practices drawing from various traditions. By the 1960 centenary celebrations, the Maha Sabha had experienced steady growth and the 1950s saw it achieve a few important milestones. Through exploring periods of stagnation and growth of the Maha Sabha during these five decades, this article aims to address some of the ways in which Hindu identity was negotiated in accordance with the changing historical setting. In particular, the article examines the attempts of Hindu leaders to unite Hindus, the reasons behind these attempts, their level of representation amongst the larger Hindu “community” and addresses possible reasons for why the project of uniting Hindus in South Africa differed from that of other places with large Hindu populations.