

## **Ramayana as the Gateway to Hindu Religious Expression among South African Hindi Speakers**

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**ABSTRACT** Hinduism was codified in scriptural works, the Vedas, Upanishads, Smritis, Shastras etc. Early in Hindu history the essence of the Hindu texts became crystallised in the Ramayana, whose Protagonist Rama was seen either as God, His Incarnation or God in human form (*Avatara*). This benign form of the Divine, descended to maintain Dharma, was adopted through various Ramayanas throughout India and South Asia. The nineteenth century indentured labourers, particularly the Sanatani (Smartha) Hindi speaking Hindus carried the heritage of Rama *bhakti* (Rama devotion) to South Africa. This article will provide an overview of the Ramayana and the Rama Ethos and endeavour to demonstrate how the Ramayana, and especially the Ramacharitmanas version, and Sri Rama constituted the religion and God of the South African Hindus, and continue to provide solace and succour through worship of Rama and His Divine Consort Sita as well as His devoted servant Hanuman.