Challenges Facing Hindus and Hinduism in Post-apartheid South Africa[1]

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ABSTRACT The aim of this paper is to analyse the challenges facing those practising Hinduism in South Africa. Celebrating the centenary of the SAHMS provides an opportunity to reflect on the past, analyse the present and more importantly to chart the future of Hindus and Hinduism in South Africa. More specifically, the key issues that will be discussed in this paper include: globalisation and internationalisation of culture; influence of Hindu nationalist forces from India; the retreat from self-help, sacrifice and community upliftment; decline in family values; promoting a scripturally based Hinduism; training and accreditation of Hindu priests; addressing the scourge of HIV/AIDS; gender representation in Hindu organisations; and the Hindu contribution to reconciliation, reconstruction and development in South Africa's fledgling democracy. A key contention of this paper is that Hindus need to consider ways in which to contribute towards nurturing and consolidating South Africa's fledgling democracy, as well as assisting in the process of reconciliation, reconstruction and development.

INTRODUCTION

Hindu and Indian identity is significantly intertwined in South Africa. Over the past two years Hindus have observed some important historical milestones in South Africa. The year 2010 marked the 150th anniversary of the arrival of indentured labourers in SA, as well as 100 years since Diwali was officially recognized as the most important Hindu festival. This year (2012) commemorates the centenary of organized Hinduism in South Africa. The South African Hindu Maha Sabha (SAHMS) the national organisation for Hindus in this country, was established on 31 May 1912. The Maha Sabha's motto, Vasudev Kutumbakam (the world is one family) resonates with African concepts such as Ubuntu (humanity to others) and Batho Pele (People first). The vision of the SAHMS is to promote Hindu Dharma according to the highest tenets of Hindu scriptures. It is important to note that the SAHMS has a federal structure, and all Hindu organisations in the country are directly or indirectly affiliated to the Sabha.

Celebrating the centenary of the SAHMS provides an opportunity to reflect on the past, analyse the present and more importantly to chart the future. The aim of this paper is to analyse the challenges facing those practising Hinduism in South Africa. More specifically, the key issues that will be discussed in this paper include: globalisation and internationalisation of culture; influence of Hindu nationalist forces from India; the retreat from self-help, sacrifice and community upliftment; decline in family values, and the associated social pathologies – abuse, violence, crime, divorce; vulnerability of youth; promoting a scripturally based Hinduism; training and accreditation of Hindu priests; addressing the scourge of HIV/AIDS; gender representation in Hindu organisations; and the Hindu contribution to reconciliation, reconstruction and development in South Africa's fledgling democracy.

This article is divided into eleven sections. The historical context is presented in the first section, followed by an analysis of the role of priests. Social pathology in the community is discussed in the third section, and the Indian connection and Hindu nationalism is the theme of the fourth part. The fifth section examines the Hindu response to HIV/AIDS, followed by an assessment vernacular language tensions in the community. Hindu demands for a religious public holiday is the theme of the eighth section, followed by a discussion of the Shuddha certification for vegetarian products. The penultimate section examines the nature of inter-racial relations, followed by some reflections on Hindu philanthropy in South Africa.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Until recently, Hinduism was transmitted largely through the oral tradition in South Africa, and there were many distortions over time

as memories faded. The origins of Hinduism in South Africa can be traced back to the agricultural labour requirements of colonial Natal in the mid-nineteenth century. The indentured Indians came mainly as isolated individuals, not in family units, and the ratio between men and women was three to one. The labourers were housed in shacks and huts, with no privacy. There was no documentary proof of 'legal' marriages. The extraordinary accomplishment of the indentured Indian is that under such circumstances they were able to develop united families and impose deep moral values on the rising generation, so that at the present time the family is recognised as the most important and stable social institution through which their beliefs and morals are transmitted (Natal Mercury 15/11/60).

Although generally perceived as a homogeneous ethnic group, the Hindu community was stratified on the basis of class, caste, religion and language. Also, given the diversity of their geographical origins, Indian migrants in South Africa were very heterogeneous. Caste segmentation has almost disappeared because migrants were drawn from a large geographic area: since caste hierarchies are only regional and not pan-Indian, they could not be maintained in a population from various origins. There was also a very material reason for caste prejudices to be reduced: all the migrants were packed in the same boat eating the same food. Furthermore, during the journey migrants became *jehaji-bhai* (ship mates), which created a new "kinship" based on the memory of the travel on the same ship, without any attention to caste nor religion.

The general success and prosperity of the immigrant group, and their ability to overcome almost impossible odds, generated a great deal of envy, bitterness and anti-Indian sentiments. Indians struggled against discrimination, poverty, lack of education as well as political and civic representation, and religious and cultural marginalisation for 130 years. Hindus managed to survive the economic and political onslaught against them primarily because of their community survival strategies.

It is well known that apartheid not only suppressed political freedom but also stifled religious choices in favour of a narrow Christian Calvinist agenda which was implicitly anti-Hindu and anti-Islam. In his "Message" on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the South African Hindu Maha Sabha (Maha Sabha) on 31 May 1993, Swami Shivapanda of the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa said:

Many organisations sprang up in the dark days of apartheid in South Africa, trying to bring about understanding and peace. Religion and culture were looked down upon, turmoil and suspicion, privation and starvation were running rampant. People of the same faith, worshipping the same God, had to pray separately because of their natural colours. Religion divided the congregation, creating superiority and inferiority complexes. This brought about inequality.

Under apartheid the Hindu community suffered as forced removals were instigated through the Group Areas Act of 1950. Temples halls and other cultural institutions were destroyed in areas such Cato Manor, Riverside and Clairwood. A major consequence of forced removals was the eroding of the joint family system and traditional lifestyles. In 1958 the Mayville Indian Ratepayers' Association (MIRA) made an emotional appeal to the DCC and the government, emphasising the attachment of people to place and community:

People form deep and lasting attachments to the places in which they live and such attachments are rooted in emotional association with homes, temples, churches, mosques, schools, burial places and with neighbours - years of friendship, the passing on of homes from generation to generation. Such are worthwhile values which cannot be set aside lightly. Is it fair to ask people, now advanced in years, to break up old associations and homes, businesses, etc. and to start afresh (Memorandum from the Mayville Indian Ratepayers' Association submitted to the Durban City Council, 30/5/1958).

It took the Hindu community a long time to rebuild their places of worship in relocated areas such as Chatsworth and Phoenix. Economic survival and subsistence was a priority in such areas. Religious sites in areas such as Chatsworth and Phoenix were readily purchased by well resourced Christian Churches, fueling a conversion to Christianity. These issues were emphasised by the Maha Sabha in its submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

In the post-apartheid era South Africans enjoy freedom of worship and Hinduism is a con-

stitutionally recognised religion. A major problem is the inability of the democratic state to fulfill its constitutional obligations because of resource constraints and the challenges of addressing the inequalities of the apartheid era. Hindus in South Africa are being influenced by forces of globalization or the internationalization of culture - basically a brand of American culture which is mass consumption orientated, and selfishly focusing on the individual rather than the family and the community. Increasingly adopting western lifestyles and value systems, in the 21ˢᵗ century Hindus in South Africa are retreating from their proud tradition of self-help, sacrifice and community upliftment.

Many of the new generation Hindu elite, loosened from the bonds of apartheid that forced people to live in the same group areas and go to local schools have, like the new Black elite, begun to display the most conspicuous forms of consumption. More and more religious festivals and ceremonies have been usurped as opportunities for ostentatious and obscene displays of wealth. Divorce amongst Hindus is on the increase. Between 2007 and 2011, according to Statistics South Africa, the Indian divorce rate increased from 5 percent to 6.2 percent. In 2008, for example, 2008, there were 1802 divorces in the Indian community, affecting 1066 children. There has also been an increase in cases of child abuse. As families become unstable, the youth are extremely vulnerable, often indulging in alcohol and drug abuse, and promiscuity. This is evident from call-in programmes on radios, letters to local newspapers, as well what the various social and welfare organisations report. There is a failure to inculcate a sense of sharing and caring amongst the youth and it is clear that parents, education institutions, and community and religious leaders have to focus on this as a matter of priority.

ROLE OF PRIESTS

A consolation has been the proliferation of religious organisations. With a few exceptions, these are democratic organisations, rooted in, and sensitive to, South African social, political and historical contexts. The formation of new organisations to nurture our religion and culture is always welcome. However, there has been a tendency among some of these organisations to focus almost exclusively on rituals, a trend

which has been perpetuated by many of priests. There is a view that poorly trained and undisciplined priests are primarily responsible for the malaise in the Hindu community. In a telling indictment on priests, Dr Reshma Sookrajh commented that the priests being churned out today rote sanskrit mantras that they can barely pronounce or explain, and only have a superficial understanding of scriptures. There is no quality control and many believe that they have a birth-right to be priests (Post 4-6 October 2000). A layperson, Ms Eureka Jaganath, remarked as follows:

Priests in South Africa, with due respect to them, need to get their act together ... I have yet to come across two priests who have had the same thing to say about a religious subject. If you speak to ten of them you get 10 different responses - all from one religion (Post, 27-30/9/00).

A survey conducted by Professor Pratap Kumar revealed that many Hindus in South Africa "seek more reflection oriented religion. That is, they are beginning to be more interested in the study of their philosophies, and so on" (Kumar 2000: 228). In the 21st Century the youth demand logic and rationality (which Hinduism offers to scientific precision) rather than blind faith. The naive and the ignorant are easy prey for poaching by the advocates of conversion. In this regard, since 2000, the Purohit Mundal of the Shree Sanathan Dharma Sabha of SA has convened a number of workshops to develop consensus amongst priests relating to the performance of the various Hindu rituals and ceremonies; promote the professional development of priests; ensure that all priests subscribed to a code of conduct; develop a national register of priests; and establish an academy for the training of priests. The ultimate goal is to organise all Hindu priests under the auspices of the South African Hindu Maha Sabha.

One hundred and twenty priests from KZN and Gauteng attended these workshops. There was concern that poorly trained and undisciplined individuals were tarnishing priesthood. The priests acknowledged that the concerns of the community were valid, and were keen to put their house in order. There was agreement that priests need to subscribe to the highest moral, ethical and spiritual standards. To this end there was unanimity about the need for a common syllabus for the training of priests, as well as a

code of conduct to regulate those who entered priesthood. There was also agreement that priesthood was not the exclusive domain of males who claimed to be *'Brahmins by birth'*. Priests were urged to be sensitive to the fact that they were functioning in a South African rather than an Indian context. Many Indian practices were irrelevant in a South African context. There is a need to turn Hinduism into a vibrant religion which reverberates on all aspects of life, logically and rationally. This will only be possible if there is an academy established to train professional Hindu priests, as well as a body to regulate their conduct.

SOCIAL PATHOLOGIES

A common feature of the Hindu diaspora includes the extended or joint family, as well as "sharply defined family roles and status based on patriarchy, gerontocracy and the subordination of the individual to the interests of the family" (Jain 1993: 45). The South African experience has been no different. Writing of the 1940's Vahed (1995: 177) points out that in Indian families, "there were clear guidelines for behaviour between men and women, adults and youth, and siblings of different ages. Parents and elders did not have to earn the respect of children, this was their automatic right since Hinduism gives authority to the old and upper classes."

As apartheid intensified, the authoritarian noose tightened and 'respect' was just a respectable word for oppression of children (even if they were adults) and intense control of all aspects of the children's lives. When children started working the pay packet was handed to the father who meted out a weekly allowance. Young married women were instantly turned into chattels slaving over the stove, the father-in-law, husband, and his unmarried brothers, always under the wary eye of the mother-in-law. So while the Indian family structure was an outer bulwark against the ravages of apartheid, in its intestines it was a churning mixture of oppression, exploitation and abuse (Desai and Maharaj 1996).

Although the extended family has been eroded to some extent (Schoombee and Mantzaris 1986), the Indian family is indeed as tight and oppressive a unit in the New South Africa as before. Its continuing closedness belies its disrepair with suicides, divorce and family murders on the increase in a community known for its religiosity. Unlike African families, the Indian family has not been changed much by apartheid or the fight against it. This was because there were different levels of oppression under apartheid and different responses (Desai and Maharaj 1996).

The patriarchal structure meant that although Indian women in South Africa were economically active, they were subjected to high levels of exploitation in terms of race, class and gender, which has continued in the post-apartheid era. In addition to their economic functions, women are expected to do all the domestic chores as well as being responsible for rearing children. There is a traditional view, often endorsed by religious scriptures that "women were expected to play the role of the matyr, subjecting their needs to those of their families or husbands" (Ramnath 2000: 51). As women become economically independent they began to subtly challenge patriarchal family structures. Males sometimes reacted violently to what they perceive as an undermining of their authority. It has been suggested that:

Notions of duty, honour and tradition that constitute the pillars of Indian social and cultural realities disallow Indian women the liberty of embracing a personal womanhood that is racially and sexually autonomous, without fear of social, communal and economic rejection … Indian women as symbolic configurations of 'Mother India, are allocated the task of maintaining racial and cultural purity, and any deviation from the responsibility of this guardianship is an affront to Indian sensibilities that is punished by familial and communal isolation (Balkisson 2004: 8).

The lack of representation of women in Hindu organisations is of concern. The new South African Constitution entrenches the rights of women and places particular emphasis on their empowerment. While Hindu women play an integral role in religious ceremonies, very few hold executive positions at an organisational level. This issue must be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Another problem area is inter-generational conflict between parents and children. Parents have great expectations for their children to be economically successful, and often put them under considerable stress. Family violence, di-

vorce and suicide were on the increase amongst South African Hindus, as well other social pathologies such as gambling, alcoholism and drug abuse.

Since the days of indenture, an enduring sense of shame, guilt, stigmatisation and personal failure associated with social pathologies has meant that the easiest escape route for some Hindus has often been suicide. Professor Lourens Schlebusch from the Department of Medically Applied Psychology at the Nelson Mandela Medical School, UKZN suggested that:

Young Indians are more likely to commit suicide now than ever before. Those killing themselves are aged between 20 and 29. And even youngsters under 19 were prone to considering suicide ... all ethnic groups are affected by suicide but numbers among Indians were relatively higher. Two percent of the suicide victims are Indians. Schlebusch blames this phenomenon on high unemployment, affirmative action and socio-economic factors (Chetty 2002: 1).

In the post-apartheid era, there was some expectation that reconnection with India would contribute to some form of Hindu renaissance in South Africa.

HINDU NATIONALISM

After decades of isolation, economic, political and cultural sanctions have been lifted and South Africans are integrating with the international community. Links are also being established with India. Some reactionary right wing supporters have been responsible for fermenting ethnic and communal tensions, seeking to entrench the caste system, and destroy places of worship in India. A tiny minority of their counterparts have been attempting to establish themselves in South Africa, and naively espousing Indian nationalism.

The majority of South Africans have no direct links with India, except as an abstract, spiritual motherland. Since the early 1990s the Sangh Parivaar, a combination of right wing reactionary Hindu organisations which include the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS) and Shiv Sena, has grown in prominence in India and gets considerable funding from diasporic networks (Prashad 2000). Hosting the World Hindu Conference in South Africa in 1995 was a means to become a member of a powerful transnational association that links Hindus all over the world, as well as a conduit for the RSS to enter the country. Since 1996 the RSS has been operating clandestinely around Durban as the HSS (Hansen 2000).[18]

In the complex dialectic relationships between migration, religion and nationalism, it has been contended that migration, since it challenges identity, often exacerbates a certain nationalism expressed by religion (van der Veer 1994; Mohammad 1998). The "communal" influence of the Sangh Parivaar, however, appeared to be rather weak in Durban, and was limited to a few individuals.

Since the early 1990s elements from the Sangh Parivaar made contact with a few South African individuals, mainly businesspersons. Contact was also made with some South African Hindu youths, who received some sponsorship for visits to India (and some kind of initiation/indoctrination into the activities of the Sangh Parivaar). There was also some contact with, (and possibly support for), South Africans studying in India. In July 1996, one such beneficiary, Mr Prem Dooken announced his intention to establish the South African branch of the VHP in order to

reintroduce them (Indians) to their roots. Our links with the motherland and our culture had been severed during the apartheid regime, we need to revitalise that relationship. We must remember that we are not South Africans but South African Indians ... an Indian will always be an Indian" (Kindra 1996: 4).

Mr Dooken then proceeded to sing the praises of the VHP which apparently had more than 120 branches internationally:

It aspires to promote the noble universal Hindu values of life all over the world, to achieve this – it develops contacts with and organises Hindus living in various countries. It strives to help them fulfil their cultural and spiritual aspirations and promote their communities in attaining respectable and affectionate relationships with the people of the countries of their adoption. And evolve ways and means to familiarise the Hindu spiritual practices amongst the people of the world ... (Kindra 1996: 4).

Mr Dooken launched a vitriolic attack on the Maha Sabha. According to Dooken, the "South African Hindu Maha Sabha and all other religious organizations in the country are 'Kumbha-

karans' who have only recently got up from sleep" (Kindra 1996: 4). The Maha Sabha, representing the different Hindu organisations, warned that "Hindus should be wary about attempts to establish a branch if the VHP in our country. Any organisation whose claim to fame is support for, and participation in the destruction of a mosque, has no place in our democratic society" (Leader 12/07/96: 6). SAHMS raised the following concerns about the presence of the VHP and its allies in South Africa:

i) The VHP is closely allied with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).

ii) The RSS has been described as a sinister movement whose members drill in khaki uniform and salute saffron flags that stand for a Hindu and not a multi-religious India.

iii) The VHP and its allies have distorted the history and principles of Hinduism to manipulate the poor and illiterate in India.

iv) Mahatma Gandhi's assassin, Nathuram Godse, was a member of the RSS.

v) It is important that the politics of Indian are not imported to South Africa. The VHP and RSS are virulently anti-Muslim. In South Africa there is no conflict between Hindus and Moslems.

vi) There is no place for racial and religious bigots in the new South Africa.

vii) Progressive Hindus in South Africa will not support organisations like the VHP and RSS (Leader 12/7/96: 6).

The destruction of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya in December 1992 had no impact in Durban, and was seen as a purely internal issue of India. The relationships between religions, especially Hinduism and Islam, are fairly harmonious in South Africa and this has been significantly influenced by the way in which Indians participated in the struggle for democracy. Hindus enjoy harmonious relations with other religions in South Africa, and this has been significantly influenced by the way in which Indians participated in the struggle for democracy in our country. South Africa has many challenges without getting embroiled in the affairs of Kashmir, Ayodha or Shri Lanka. There is no place for racial or religious bigots in the new South Africa.

AIDS

It has been predicted that the scourge of AIDS is likely to ravage the province of KZN, with one in three persons being affected. The Hindu community will not be immune to this trend. It is imperative that priests and other religious leaders educate their congregations about AIDS in a community that often adopts an ostrich mentality to such issues. According to Dr Krishna Nair there has been an upsurge in HIV cases in predominantly Indian areas: there is an overall prevalence of two percent HIV positive patients in Chatsworth, 2.2 percent in Phoenix and a staggering 16 percent in the Stanger area (Leader 17 November 2000). The rates of infection are probably considerably higher now. According to Swami Saradananda of the Ramakrishna Centre, "several unhealthy social attitudes (or high risk activities) have been responsible, in no small measure, towards the rapid, spread of AIDS" (Post 18-21 October 2000).

In an attempt to address the problem, the Maha Sabha commissioned medical academic and Haematologist, Professor Vinod Jogessar to prepare a paper on the subject. Professor Jogessar emphasised that no one was immune from the disease, and there was a need to empathise with those who were infected:

We cannot adopt an indifferent attitude and think that it does not exist or that it will never touch us. We accept its presence, live clean wholesome lives and see how we can help. As Hindus, we should not develop judgmental attitudes towards those infected with HIV (Post, 18-21 October, 2000).

Vernacular Language Tensions[2]

If the first segmentation of Indians in Natal was according to regional origins in India, North and South, these very groups were also subdivided into linguistic groups (respectively Hindi and similar languages; Dravidian languages; and Memon, Konkani, Gujarati). Many, but not all, of the indentured labourers came from the lower castes of Indian society, at a time when more than 80 percent of the population of that country was illiterate. It has been suggested that "for transplanted people, intellectual culture and traditions need a written support for surviving" (Singaravelou 1987: 117).

It is not surprising that the two processes described by Singaravelou in the West Indies' diaspora occurred in South Africa as well: linguistic "homogenisation" (the dialects disappeared to the advantage of the main vernacu-

lars - Hindi, Tamil, etc.) and linguistic "erosion" (decline of the vernaculars vis-a-vis the languages of the dominant groups).[10] As a result of the concentration of a great number of Indians in the same region (now KwaZulu Natal), and the apartheid policy which created a certain isolation of the "Indian race", the vernaculars seem to have survived a little longer in South Africa. While in 1951 only 6 percent of the Indian South Africans spoke English at home, this increased to 32 percent in 1970, 73 percent in 1980 (Arkin et al. 1989). According to the 1996 census, 94.4 percent of Asians declared English as their home language. Even Gujarati, which for long remained the business language and the teaching of which was supported by the affluence of the Gujarati community, was eventually eroded. This was partly because it was considered by Muslims with roots in the state of Gujarat as a language of Hindus. Many of these Muslims shifted to Urdu, at least in the religious sphere.[11]

The vernacular is still an important marker of identification even though it may not be spoken anymore. In this case, it has become the name of a community, not the name of a language as such. It can also include religious features. Pupils spontaneously answer "Hindu" for their religion, but also "Tamil" or "Hindi", which, for them mean:"I am Hindu of Tamil or Hindi culture". This is why, with regard to marriage, a sort of "language endogamy" is to be found. This linguistic division amongst Hindus was very strong in the first half of the century.

There is some differentiation based on regional origins between Hindus of north and south Indian origin, and this is associated with the Hindi and Tamil languages, respectively. This linguistic division amongst Hindus was very strong in the first half of the century. This diminished somewhat in the past thirty years, as a result of a significant increase in inter- linguistic marriages. Ironically, in the post-1994 period, there has been a resurgence of linguistic divisions in the community where the majority neither speak nor understand either Tamil or Hindi. Basically, a minority group is being further sub-divided, and in a democracy, numbers count.

The Tamil speaking community, which forms the largest part of the Indian community in South Africa, feels culturally marginalised. There have been concerns, for example, that the national Indian radio station, Lotus FM, plays little south Indian music, and that there was a similar neglect or bias on television. The manager of Lotus FM argued that market research had revealed that the majority of the listeners, including Tamil speakers, preferred Hindi music. The Tamil Action Group called on the SABC "to apologise to the Tamil people for gross discrimination" and demanded equal airtime for north and south Indian music (Govender 2002: 1).

Vegetarianism and Shuddha Certification[3]

There are numerous scriptural injunctions which indicate that vegetarianism was an important principle of Hinduism. Some examples include:

Avoiding harm to all creatures. . . this is true knowledge. All else is ignorance (Bhagavad-Gita 13:8); Nonviolence . . . and mercy to all life forms are the goals of godly persons who are endowed with My nature (Bhagavad-Gita 16:1); Having well considered the origin of flesh-foods, and the cruelty of fettering and slaying corporeal beings, let man entirely abstain from eating flesh (Manusmriti 5.49); You must not use your God-given body for killing God's creatures, whether they are human, animal or whatever (Yajur Veda 12.32).

Over the years the Maha Sabha has received complaints about supposed vegetarian products containing animal ingredients or contaminants. Hindus make up the majority of vegetarians in South Africa, and are required to abstain from all animal products during fasting. Further, with the considerable growth in vegetarianism in recent years among Hindus and others, the need for a trusted independent certification authority was growing.

The Maha Sabha, as the parent body representing Hindus in South Africa, has taken on this responsibility. The Shuddha Logo is the official registered trademark of the Maha Sabha. Food manufacturing companies are also beginning to realise the potential of using the logo on their range of products. Many manufacturers market their products as vegetarian. Closer investigation often reveals that such products contain animal fats or additives of animal origin. The logo represents the 'Lotus Flower' symbolizing purity and is made available to firms identifying vegetarian foods, after an independent

investigation by the Maha Sabha, in consultation experts. For a product to be accredited by the Shuddha Committee it must meet the following criteria:

i)   Free from animal meat, protein, tissue or fat (meat, poultry, fish or shellfish), or bone stock, animal or carcass fats, gelatine, insect or extracts from insects or any other ingredients resulting from slaughter.

ii)   Any primary packaging material (edible or non-edible) used to protect, sell, distribute food should should not contain any of the above, for example, wax coatings on cheese and related foods, sausage casings, etc.

iii) No pre-treatment of food should contain any of the above material, even if the material is extracted or absent from the final end-product.

iv)   Contain no eggs.

v)   Cruelty free – no animal testing.

vi)   Free from alcohol.

vii) No cross contamination during the production process. If the production line is shared with non-vegetarian products, thorough cleaning must be carried out before vegetarian production commences. This extends to all associated machinery, equipment, utensils, surfaces and clothing, which must remain free from non vegetarian ingredients before vegetarian products are touched, prepared, produced or packaged. Strict procedures must be in place to ensure packaging mix-ups and other errors do not occur.

The primary goal of the Shuddha Committee is to provide a widely recognized Certification programme which will enable vegetarians to make accurate and informed food choices; to promote the interests, concerns and ideals of Hinduism and individuals and organizations that choose a vegetarian lifestyle; that they can be confident in their choices and manufacturers claims.

RELIGIOUS PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

While South Africa is a secular state, Nelson Mandela had emphasized that in South Africa "there shall also be a social order which respects completely the culture, language and religious rights of all sections of our society and the fundamental rights of the individual". A key issue is in what ways have minority groups (viewed in the Calvinist apartheid era as heathens and savages) and their faiths/cultures in South Africa been portrayed in the national psyche?

The reality is that except for rhetorical homage on Heritage Day, minority cultures and faiths are largely invisible in South Africa. This can be exemplified by the unceremonious closure of the Indian Documentation and Cultural Centre Derby Street (in favour of Mbongeni Ngema's commercial venture) and the continuous threats to eliminate Indian languages from the school curriculum.

This can be further illustrated by the failure to recognize important festivals in the Muslim and Hindu faiths, which have significant adherents amongst Indians in South Africa. Given that it is the dominant faith in South Africa, recognition of Christian holidays is important. However, the ANC government has failed to declare even one holiday for the minority faiths, which would be Diwali and Eid, observed by Hindus and Muslims, respectively. It is important to note that outside India, Diwali is a public holiday in Nepal, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Mauritius, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname, Malaysia, Singapore, and Fiji (the majority of these countries have descendents of indentured labourers). There are moves afoot to declare Diwali a national holiday in New Zealand and even the United Kingdom.

Jay Lakhani of Vivekananda Centre and director of education for the Hindu Council in the United Kingdom, contended that making Diwali a public holiday in the United Kingdom "reflects that we live in a pluralistic society and that means it is necessary to adopt an inclusivist approach allowing celebration of other world religions through public holidays".[4] In the United States President Obama has recognized the significance of Diwali by symbolically lighting a lamp in the White House. He stated that Hindus in 'will celebrate … by lighting Diyas, or lamps, which symbolize the victory of light over darkness, and knowledge over ignorance. And while this is a time of rejoicing, it's also a time for reflection, when we remember those who are less fortunate and renew our commitment to reach out to those in need.[5]

Since 1994, the Maha Sabha has made two unsuccessful submissions to the ANC government requesting that Diwali be declared a national holiday in South Africa, which was also supported by the Devasthanam Foundation of

South Africa (Council of South Indian Temples), and the South African Tamil Federation. A joint submission by the national leadership of the Hindu and Muslim communities may be more effective. Perhaps these submissions should be accompanied by mass action, the only language that the ANC government seems to understands. The ANC government has publicly acknowledged that there was a need to reconsider South Africa's national holidays. Declaring a national holiday for Diwali and Eid would increase recognition, respect, reconciliation and understanding of South Africa's religious and multi-cultural diversity; translate the noble intentions of the Bill of Rights and Constitution pertaining to minorities into reality; would go a long way towards reducing racism, prejudice and xenophobia; and would promote reconciliation, tolerance, harmony and social cohesion.

INTER-RACIAL RELATIONS

Almost everywhere, where Hindus, who are predominantly Indian, and Black African, as the indigenous population is officially categorized, form part of the population, there is the perception that Hindus are not merely apprehensive of Blacks, but likely to observe a caste-like discrimination against them. One could go so far as to say that Indians have, in some places, shut Blacks out of their moral vision, and invested them with an evil that properly belongs to political and social structures. Indians, because of their phobia of losing cultural identity tend to be over religious, rigid, conservative, orthodox, close and restrictive. This cultural detachment of Asians from the African mainstream has "indirectly invited or contributed to racial discrimination by the natives against Indians, which has later turned into racial atrocity in several countries after their independence" (Motwani and Motwani 1989: 3). In the post-colonial era Asians "stood out as discordant, unassimilable citadels of exclusiveness" (Bhatia 1973:18). A major challenge for the survival of Asians in Africa is to reduce and transcend this cultural divide (Bhushan 1989).

By the time East Africa attained independence Indians were a dominant force in the economy but were insulated as a community and marginalised politically. While the colonial state fostered a collective Asian identity from above, this was reinforced by impulses emanating from within the Asian community itself. Caught between an antagonistic colonial minority government and fear of the African masses, the Asians confirmed their cultural identity (Desai and Maharaj 1996).

Racial politics is clearly not the preserve of one community. If Hindus are prone to withdraw into their own culture, other communities are just as much swayed by racial considerations. In March 1999, the editor of the Inkatha Freedom (Zulu) Party-owned *Ilanga* blamed Indians for continuing to oppress Africans, and wished that "maybe here in South Africa as well an African mother will be blessed to give birth to another Idi Amin" (an allusion to the 1971 of 60 000 Indians out of Uganda by Idi Amin Dada) (Ramsamy 2007: 475). In early 2002, internationally renowned playwright and composer, Mbongeni Ngema, released an inflammatory anti-Indian song, *AmaiNiya,* in the Zulu language in which he called for "strong and brave men to confront Indians" who "do not want to change … Even Mandela has failed to convince them to change. Whites were far better than Indians … we are poor because all things have been taken by Indians. They are oppressing us…" (Singh 2002: 2). The song was condemned by leaders across the political spectrum and the South African Human Rights Commission, and was subsequently banned from the airwaves. Ngema responded that as an artist he was merely reflecting the views of many Africans:

The only way to heel a wound was to open it and clean and that was the painful part … If the truth is not spoken and issues are not dealt with head-on, problems will never be solved. No one has had the guts to voice their feelings before. I have merely recorded what people are saying (Singh 2002: 2).

If Hindus and Hinduism are to survive in South Africa there is an urgent need to revert to basic values of sharing and caring - uplifting the poor and disadvantaged in a severely fractured society.

HINDU PHILANTHROPY

Scriptures compel all Hindus to engage in some form of charity (*daan*) and social upliftment, according to ability, selflessly, without expectation of reward (*Nishkhaam Karma*). Some give money, while others offer time and

labour in support of worthy causes. According to the *Bhagavad Gita* (Chapter 17, verse 21) charity that is given as a matter of duty, desiring nothing in return, to a deserving candidate at the right place and time, is called *sattvikam.*

In South Africa, Hindu philanthropic giving patterns are contextualised within welfare (especially poverty alleviation initiatives and feeding programmes), culture and knowledge-empowerment (through planned cultural activities and the distribution of religious books) and development and service orientations (the building of schools and homes for indigent families). The outreach work of almost all Hindu organisations has a built-in welfare component, which extends beyond adherents (Sookraj 2005).

The Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa, for example, is involved in numerous humanitarian programmes, including child and youth development; Ramakrishna Nutritional Programmes (assists 6000 people daily); Ramakrishna Clinic, Phoenix (with over 50 volunteer doctors who treated 8 883 patients in 2011 free of charge); pioneering AIDS relief work; Ramakrishna Legal Advisory Desk; and the GZ Masingza Skills Development Centre (Inanda). Reflecting on the work of the Ramakrishna Centre, the Honourable Mr Justice Langa wrote in the Centre's 70th Anniversary Brochure:

Your faith and your actions remind us all that we too have a role and a duty to improve the lives of those with whom we share this earth. Although the resources of government are vast, there can never be a substitute for the power of committed individuals volunteering the time, skills and money for 'the liberation of the self, and the welfare of the world'.

The Divine Life Society of South Africa is currently involved in projects from building of schools for the disadvantaged sector of the community, building 255 homes for displaced Africans and Indians in Waterloo, Verulam; baptismal centres at Port Dumford and Inanda; and making of sandwiches for school children at five different centres in KwaZulu Natal. Sbu Ndebele, the premier of KwaZulu Natal, noted that this partnership between government and the Divine Life Society has been a longstanding relationship in which the Society had contributed more than R70 million towards community improvement projects in the province (Daily News, 14 September 2005). According to Ina Cronje, MEC of Education in KwaZulu Natal

since January 2004, the Society has completed over fifty schools, with three hundred classrooms in total. The Society is also engaged in sanitation and water programmes in schools around the province. Currently, Divine Life Society of South Africa is building schools in the Okahlamba, Ethekwini, Zululand and South Coast regions. We commend the Society for its support in trying to relieve the backlog of classrooms in rural areas. We also want to compliment Divine Life Society for its speedy delivery, quality and cost effectiveness. [6]

Perhaps also worthy of mention is the construction of the Ganga Baptismal Centre (designed in a way that it is also used for cultural and educational purposes) for the Nazareth Baptist Church at Ebuhleni in KwaZulu Natal, as an example of how the Society's work extends beyond pure ethnic, cultural or racial orientation. Since Africans also worship water, the input by Divine Life Society was received with great appreciation by the Shembe worshippers. There is a growing networking and co-operation that goes beyond race, culture and class (Sookraj 2005).

CONCLUSION

South Africa is rapidly being transformed into a non-racial democracy. Of course, given the devastating impact of apartheid, this process has not been without its problems, especially crime, violence, corruption and abuse. These social pathologies appear to endemic, and the Hindu community is not immune. According to Hindu scriptures the era of spiritual degeneration or Kalyug, is the iron age of industry and commerce, and crass materialism, when crime, violence and corruption will be rampant. Hinduism, with its eternal focus on righteousness and the guidance it has receives from the self-realized, and the disciplined lifestyle it promotes, is ideally equipped to combat corruption.[7] Indeed, a common thread in Hindu scriptures is the call to fight for justice and righteousness.

Hindus need to consider ways in which to contribute towards nurturing and consolidating South Africa's fledgling democracy, as well as assisting in the process of reconciliation, reconstruction and development. There is a need to reflect on how the scourges threatening to engulf South Africa can be overcome. There is also a necessity to reach out to other communities in a way that is not condescending, but out of genu-

ine concern to shed prejudices and breakdown barriers entrenched by apartheid. This will require prayer and action - of the kind espoused in the Ramayan and Bhagavad Gita. Hindu organisations are involved in poverty alleviation activities, such as feeding schemes and the provision of social welfare and medical assistance, as well as developmental projects, such as the building of schools, teaching skills, and building low income houses.

Ethnic minorities throughout the world have fears about majority domination. With the current political changes taking place, there has been concern that the cultural and religious interests of Hindus may be jeopardised. A contribution that Hindus can make to the socio-political transformation of South Africa is the 'satyagraha' tradition which can serve to show the country that the principles of non-violence and tolerance have a place in South Africa.

The South African Hindu Maha Sabha has played a significant role within the Hindu community but also in wider South African society through the long and tortured twentieth century of our country. As we reconstruct our country and forge links with the international community, facing a global world that is in economic turmoil and moral and political crisis, the Sabha must once again in this the 100th year of its existence renew its vows and once more ensure that Hindus are not cut off from broader society, that our spirituality is matched with desire for a better society and our prayers and rituals always spur a sense for deepening philanthropy and generosity.

NOTES

1   This paper draws on the authors' experience of working in the faith sector for the past 30 years, as well as researching and writing about the South African Indian community.
2   This section draws generously from Landy, Maharaj, and Mainet-Valleix, 2004.
3   This section draws generousky from the SAHMS wesbiste: http://www.sahms.org.za/shuddha-certification.html (accessed 16 July 2012).
4   www.hinduismtoday.com/blogs-news/hindu-press-international/hindus-make-case-for-diwali-as-public-uk-holiday/5862.html (accessed 14/6/12).
5   www.tanenbaum.org/blog/10/09/friday-news-roundup-diwali-white-house (accessed 14/6/12).
6   Speech made by Ina Cronje, MEC of Education, KwaZulu Natal http://www.sivananda.dls.org.za

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