Religious Co-existence: Tolerance and Contestation amongst Hindu and Muslim Faith Groups of Indian Origin in South Africa

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ABSTRACT The 9/11 bombings sparked worldwide debate on religious tolerance and co-existence amongst different faith groups. Living in a global village with porous boundaries, the movement of people to different regions and localities has added a plural dimension to the practice of religion. In the case of South Africa, such religious pluralism has existed for more than three centuries. For the past 150 years, Indians of both the Hindu and Islamic faiths have added to this pluralism, making South Africa a religious Rainbow Nation. Indians as a diaspora are not a religiously homogenous grouping although they have a common ancestry. During their early years of settlement in South Africa, they succeeded in establishing a sense of religious identity in diverse community groups, but the apartheid era fragmented their social cohesion. This disruption of community life paved the way for religious tolerance, creating new contested spaces for religious practice. This article aims to provide a socio-historical analysis of these contested religious spaces in the different phases of their social evolution and sets the foundation for future research in the context of national transformation in a democratic era and global contestations for religious identity, co-existence and tolerance.

INTRODUCTION

The history of Hindus and Muslims of Indian origin in South Africa is a complex one, underscored by a diverse set of socio-economic and political factors. Notwithstanding a common ancestry, these religious communities vary in respect of class, ethnicity, language, cultural traditions, belief structures and social evolution. Hindus and Muslims may be classified into two broad categories, those that entered the country under the indentured labour system (1860-1911) and those that followed in their footsteps in search of greener economic pastures. The latter are generally referred to as 'passengers' in the literature and included many merchants. Despite differences in their socio-historical origin, both groups had to endure the political brutality of British colonialism, followed by a system of racial discrimination under successive white minority governments, which reached its zenith during the apartheid era from 1948 to 1994. The socio-economic and political contexts of Indians in South Africa have been adequately documented. However, there is a paucity of literature on Hindu-Muslim relations from a comparative perspective. One notable exception was Moosa Ismail (M.I.) Meer's 1950s analysis of religious tolerance titled *Islam and Non-Muslims.*[1] Written from an Islamic perspective the book won little support from Muslim theologians in South Africa. This article attempts to break this silence by providing an historical overview of co-existence, tolerance and contestations between Hindus and Muslims in South Africa, and pointing to avenues of future research. It provides a snapshot of the religious dynamics at play, as space constraints prevent a deeper engagement with the key issues raised.

The first section of the article examines the basic religious principles underlying Islam and Hinduism in the Indian sub-continent, setting the foundation for the subsequent analysis of how they have shaped and styled the diaspora in present-day South Africa.

BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF HINDUISM AND ISLAM

Hinduism and Islam promote different ways of life, modes of worship, food habits, and notions of what is sacred. While Islam originated in Saudi Arabia in the sixth century, Hinduism is considerably older and dates back some 5,000 years (Sunderlal 2005: 4). One key difference is that Hindus believe God to be formless but adored in every form, whilst Islam strictly adheres to the form (Ravishankar 2002: 1-2). The sacred book for Muslims is the Quran, while Hindus regard the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Itihaas*, *Bhagvad Gita, Mahâbhârata, Râmâyana*, *Âgamasand* and the *Puranas* as sacred and authentic. Scholars of Hinduism refer to adherents as *Sanatana Dharma*, which means

'eternal religion', or *Vedic Dharma* meaning 'religion of the *Vedas*'. 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 a particular society or individual to select a preferred god. This explains the boundless tolerance that Hinduism shows towards every conceivable form of religious belief and practice (Griswold 1912: 166-167).

Islam originated in the Arabian Peninsula, where it reversed thousands of years of idolatrous practices. Within a short period of time its monotheistic belief structure spread across the Middle East, Caucasus, Europe, Asia, Africa, and into parts of India. The Quran is unequivocally accepted by Muslims as the final message of God, which contains a socio-political, economic and legal system based on canonical *(Shariah)* prescriptions to guide human behaviour at micro, meso and macro levels of society. Islam places much emphasis on rights and obligations in instances where non-Muslims are in a minority but provides little guidance when they find themselves in the opposite position. Islam, like Hinduism, is not a homogenous religion, although the basic articles of faith are universally accepted by most Muslims. The greatest divide is between the Shias and Sunnis who comprise the majority of Muslims.

Under the Moghul dynasty in India (16th-19th centuries), Islam found a theological home by adapting to local Hindu customs and traditions. The Bhakti saints tried to harmonise the heterogenic elements of the great and small traditions of Hinduism and Islam. They preached a philosophy of life which was close to the social ethics and philosophical problems that were shared by the poor and artisans of both faiths (Burman 1996: 1211). These were integrated into a common religious system, such that Islam in India accepted and retained local cultural traditions but adapted those to its own requirements and needs by injecting an Islamic content into them (Fazelbhoy 1997: 1548). Rituals, especially those described as 'syncretic', indicating a certain identity and continuity in the social practices of Muslims and Hindus, pervaded the Indian social system, resulting in a high level of tolerance. In medieval India, Hindu and Muslim religious groupings subscribed to a common underlying social and religious structure characterised by opposition to other-worldly mystics, except for those represented by the *Sufi 'Tariqat'* (way of life) and the Hindu *'sanyasi'*, the priest (represented by the *Shariat* for Muslims and the Brahmin for Hindus), the state (represented by *'hukumat')*, and the king (Fazelbhoy 1997: 155). It is on the basis of this early religious orientation in India that both Hinduism and Islam have evolved as diasporic religions in South Africa over the past century and half.

EVOLUTION OF HINDUISM AND ISLAM IN SOUTH AFRICA

The first batch of indentured Indians reached the colony of Natal on 16 November 1860 on the *SS Truro*. In all 152,184 indentured 'human cargo' was shipped to the shores of Durban over a period of 51 years, comprising 62 percent males, 25 percent females and 13 percent children (India Ministry of External Affairs 2000: 76). In so far as their ethnic and religious composition is concerned, two thirds were Tamil and Telegu speakers from South India, and the remainder from what is known today as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal. Around 12 percent were Muslims, and 2 percent were Christians. Most had no formal education but managed to sustain strong memories of their customs, traditions and rituals which they preserved diligently (India Ministry of External Affairs 2000: 76). In the post-indenture period they settled across the Natal colony and outside of it.

From the 1870s a second group of Indians began streaming into Natal in search of economic opportunities. Within this group were a fair number of Gujarati-speaking Hindus but a large proportion was Muslims originating from the Gujarat districts of Surat, Kholwad, Rander, Kathor, Baroda, Bardoli and Navsari (Randeree 1997: 70). They constituted about 10 percent of the total Indian population and comprised mainly traders (India Ministry of External Affairs 2000: 77). These groupings of Muslims were mistaken by the colonial whites for Arabs due to their Middle Eastern dress code. Both religious groups within this category enjoyed enormous trading opportunities and freedom of movement in the city to pursue their business interests and they ventured into remote towns in Natal and the Transvaal where they set up trading posts. Some of them owned family busi-

nesses that engaged the services of extended family members. Most indentured Indians, in contrast, lacked the capital to make significant investment in business (Bawa 2006: 168). Trading class Indians were later joined by a professional grouping to serve their changing social, political and economic needs (India Ministry of External Affairs 2000: 77).

The social and economic condition of early generations of indentured Indians contrasted sharply with those of the trading and professional class. Long hours of work on minimum food rations, cramped regimented dwellings constructed of stone and zinc, or wattle and daub, poor sanitary and health conditions, the lack of medical care facilities, racial prejudice and physical abuse took its toll on these migrants. Social and health related problems in the form of suicide, crime, drug and alcohol abuse, mental illness, violence, infidelity, desertions, tuberculosis and other diseases, infanticide, and fatal burns were some of the many hardships encountered by the early settlers (Meer 1980) that militated against the preservation of family life, religious values and practices. Sociocultural and religious dilemmas were also a major challenge. A diversity of languages was spoken in the colony, including Tamil, Bhojpuri, Gujarati, Telugu, Urdu, Kokani, and Meman, a dialect of Sindhi (Mesthrie 1991: 336), which restricted social interaction to certain linguistic groups.

The unequal ratio of males to females (3:1) added to this isolation as the prospect of forming intimate relationships became remote. Although some migrants arrived as a family unit, many were single males – a socially engineered strategy by the British to ensure that they remained unencumbered to sell their labour to their masters. Females were often obliged out of economic necessity and sometimes fear to cohabit with a number of men simultaneously without the protection of marriage for the explicit purpose of male sexual gratification (Meer 1972: 37). Finding a spouse within one's religious and ethnic grouping proved difficult. Marriages registered in 1872, 12 years after the arrival of indentured Indians, recorded that 67 percent were between Muslims and Hindus (Meer 1980: 262). These interreligious marriages made it difficult for the next generation to preserve its religious and cultural identity. This resulted in subsequent generations impos-

ing taboos against such marriages (Desai and Vahed 2010: 205). This taboo was more strongly enforced amongst the trading classes who were able to obtain spouses from their villages of origin. In many instances where religious boundaries were crossed, the non-Muslim spouse embraced Islam (Khan 2009: 90).

Notwithstanding attempts to preserve religious identity through marriage, this early period witnessed a marked degree of religious tolerance and coexistence. Among the different Hindu groupings, the Festival of Chariots and *Kavady* may be considered the most important religious expressions in the absence of organised forms of religion in these early years. Indentured Muslims followed suit, observing *Muharrum* (the Islamic New Year), dubbed 'Coolie Xmas' by the colonialists, by carrying the *taziya* (pagoda) through the towns, accompanied by elaborate celebration and splendor. Vahed (2002: 3) notes that Hindus participated in large numbers in these celebrations and that this served as an important expression of community and belonging. *Meelads* or *Moulood* (the celebration of the birth of the Prophet Muhammed), which was organised by the more affluent Muslim religious groupings was also marked by a significant presence of Indians of Hindu origin. Interestingly, the arrival of the saint *Hadrat* Soofie Saheb in 1895 set the foundation for religious associational life amongst Muslims of predominantly indentured origin. He purchased land on the banks of the Umgeni River from a Hindu, Narainsamy, to build a mosque, *khanqah* (teaching hospice), *madrassah* and cemetery. The earlier spiritual master, *Hadrat* Badsha Pir,[2] who engaged in proselytization amongst Muslims of indentured origin, is also known to have had significant standing amongst Hindu Indians. The tombs of both spiritual personalities in Durban continue to be visited by some sections of the Hindu faith during times of calamity, distress, and personal misfortune due to a belief in their mystic influence.

Among Hindus, religious associational life can be noted in termsof the construction of formal places of worship in the form of temples. This was a major departure from the early temples, which were set up under the shade of a tree or near a river. These early temples were created from images constructed from historical memory of prayer sites by indentured Indians, but by the 20th century more elaborate rep-

licas of architecture dotted the religious landscape through the building of places of worship (South African Hindu Maha Sabha Centenary Supplement 2012: 4). The Shri Vaithianatha Easvarar Alayam (1883) and Durban Hindu Temple (1898), as well as many more temples from the 1900s, were early attempts to promote cultural, social and religious associational life (South African Hindu Maha Sabha Centenary Supplement 2012: 4). The formation of the Hindu Maha Sabha in 1912 brought the different sub-faith groups under an umbrella body whose aim was religious unity and a universal understanding of the scriptural texts beyond the ambiguity presented by linguistic and class differences.

FORCED REMOVALS AND THE DESECRATION OF RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

Despite the pervasive brutality, many Indians established a permanent presence in the country during the colonial period. Those of indentured extraction, emancipated from their burden, could now focus on personal advancement through educational opportunities, access to religious and community infrastructure, family life and social stability. The establishment of mosques and temples provided spiritual mentoring and religious self-preservation. Some of these places of worship were funded by the trading and working class, but their actual construction was often undertaken voluntarily by indentured members of the respective religious groups. The Indian presence in the heart of the city of Durban was dominated by Indians of passenger origin of both faith groups. Their economic progress raised much concern amongst white businesses and various restrictive laws were imposed on their movement and settlement within the economic hub from the 1890s. In certain parts of the city, such as Cato Manor, Indians of indentured extraction from both religious groups, established themselves as market gardeners and later lived side by side with the indigenous Africans as they too moved into urban areas.

The coming of Mohandas K. Gandhi, who spent the years 1893-1914 in South Africa, and the formation of the Natal Indian Congress (NIC) in 1894 to champion the political rights of Indians helped to solidify a common space for interaction and dialogue across religious groupings. Many projects (child welfare societies and state aided schools being examples) were later jointly established by Hindu and Muslim philanthropists. A concerted effort was made to create a unified political voice against the British, the white minority government when the Union of South Africa was formed in 1910, and subsequently when the National Party came to power in 1948, resulting in the introduction of apartheid. At the same time that Black people in South Africa were subjected to apartheid, India was positioning itself for independence from British colonial rule. Religious differences between Hindus and Muslims threatened to divide the country into two nations through the political project of partition. For Indians in South Africa, identification with their land of origin during these early years was a source of much anxiety.

The period from the 1950s also witnessed the rise of institutions and exemplars among both Hindus and Muslims. Many organisations surfaced among Muslims, laying the framework for the preservation and promotion of Muslim identity in the context of the major socio-political changes taking place in both India and South Africa. The Jamiat Ulama (1952) established the foundation for a class of religious leaders subscribing to the *Deobandi* religious school of thought, an emerging strand of Islam popular primarily amongst the Gujarati-speaking passenger Indians.[3] The Natal Muslim Council (1943), on the other hand, was tugging in a different direction. Sometimes explicitly wary of religious leaders, it generally forged Muslim identity at the social, educational and political levels. They represented the trend set by the Muslim League (1906) and other groups throughout the Muslim world. The Islamic Propagation Centre was founded in 1957 to respond to increasing Christian proselytisation among Muslims. The Arabic Study Circle and Women's Cultural Centre were also finding their feet in this rich cultural efflorescence (Jeppie 2007). Some of these groups emphasised the distinctiveness of Muslims in comparison with Hindus and Christians. *Indian Views*, a progressive newspaper, reflecting on the religious differences that were tearing the Indian sub-continent apart, warned local Indians against the apartheid regime's strategy to divide and rule Indians of different religious persuasions in the

southern tip of Africa. Much later, the Sunni Jamiatul Ulema (1978), Darul Uloom Aleemiyah Razvia (1983), and Imam Ahmed Raza Academy (1986) (Vahed 2002: 5) were established to champion the theological, spiritual, educational and general social welfare needs of Sunni Muslims, predominantly comprised of former indentured Indians of the Islamic faith.

The apartheid regime's notorious Group Areas Act (1950) had a devastating effect on the organisation of religious spaces and identity for both faith groups. However, those of the indentured classes experienced the greatest trauma of being uprooted, displaced and resettled into monolithic and socially sterile public housing estates in different parts of South African towns and cities. The South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) Survey, (1981: 220) recorded that 23,227 Indian families were victims of forced removals in Natal. In Durban, the largest settlements of Indians in Riverside, Cato Manor, Mayville, Magazine Barracks, Block AK central Durban, the Bluff and Clairwood were uprooted and resettled in the township of Chatsworth, the first racial settlement established in the city. Communities were separated from temples, mosques, burial sites, and community facilities, all of which are known to contribute to community social organisation and associational life (Maharaj 1994: 3). Both religious groups were faced with the choice of either succumbing or overcoming the desecrating effects on their social organisation, religiosity, and individual and community identity.

Chatsworth's three storey blocks of two-bedroomed flats, with approximately 10 families living in each block, provided compacted living arrangements that altered sociological dynamics and created stress in the lives of Indians of both religious groups. Overcrowding, the breakdown of the extended family network, a lack of care of the aged and sick, children coming into contact with diverse values and norms due to cultural and religious differentiation, living in an environment with increasing alcohol and drug abuse and the absence of religious, cultural and social amenities unraveled religious value systems which had been consolidated over a period of 90 years. The housing, designed for nuclear families, contributed to the breakdown of the family, divorce, children being admitted to para-state institutional care, the aged mov-

ing to old age homes, and marriage outside religious groupings, resulting in various social and psychological pathologies. Relocated far from their place of work, an increase in travel time and cost, being separated from family networks and adapting to a nuclear family life style are some of the physical, social and psychological stresses that victims of relocation had to endure. The more organised Christian movements in the country, with the support of international funding, seized the opportunity to set up churches in the townships, inviting new adherents into the fold of Christianity[4]. Missionary work and food aid to poor township residents gained momentum. In public schools funded by the apartheid regime learners were forced to recite a common prayer at assembly which had a strong Christian orientation (Maluleka 2011: 8).

The absence of places of worship for Indians of both religious groups and diminishing levels of religious values and norms for the socialisation of the next generation of youth paved the way for rapid westernisation. Two studies strongly allude to the permeation of western culture and its influence on the Indian community as a whole. Hofmeyer (1982: 141-143) asserts that Hindus suffered a major setback due to the collapse of the extended and joint family systems. He notes that in the joint family system, religious instruction was achieved informally through a process of osmosis. In the nuclear family system, the absence of elders to inform and motivate the younger generation, resulted in ignorance of both the beliefs and behaviours of long held home rituals among Hindus. Schoombee and Mantzaris (1985: 56) cite the views of the Muslim clergy who maintained that the western values and way of life were a hazard to the Indian family and corrupted the minds of young Muslims. More recently Singh and Harisunker (2010: 41-43) in their analysis of Indian women's response to dress codes in Durban, observed that within the Hindu community younger females tended to exercise their right to choose western wear over traditional clothing, suggesting a need to break away from the rigidity of the past, but at the same time not compromising their appreciation for traditional wear on special religious and family occasions. The same can perhaps be said to hold true in certain respects for Indians of the Islamic religion[5].

RELIGIOUS CONTESTATIONS AND ASSERTION OF IDENTITY

The devastating effects of forced removals and resettlement paved the way for religious contestations and spaces in pursuit of hegemony between and amongst the two main religious groups. This was further motivated by increased proselytisation from the Christian movements. In light of the diversity of religious practices and beliefs amongst the Hindu and Islamic religious groups, intra-religious competition to attract adherents to a particular strand of religious orientation emerged[6]. Amongst adherents of the Hindu faith groups, there was also contestation on certain ritualistic practices and scriptural interpretation. As late as 2006 such conflicts continued to surface within the Hindu faith groups, making them vulnerable to conversion to other religions and threatening its status as a consolidated religious grouping (Group Writers South Africa 2006: 20).

Whilst contestations for religious spaces were being played out, the conflict often took acrimonious forms on issues both within the country and those filtering into the country, resulting in low levels of religious tolerance and co-existence. Although these contestations did not reflect the religious orientation of the majority of adherents amongst both religious groups, they have led to tensions and polarisation within the diaspora as a whole. Amongst those who hold a universal view on religious co-existence and tolerance, it has created discomfort and apologetic responses on behalf of the perpetrators of such religious intolerance. The work of the Islamic Propagation Centre International (IPCI) is a case in point which raised the ire of devout Hindus and Christians alike through the publication and distribution of inflammatory books and videos from the 1950s to the 1980s. In the 1980s, an anti-Hindu video stated that Indian Muslims were 'fortunate' that their Hindu forefathers 'saw the light' and converted to Islam when Muslim rulers dominated some areas of India. Revered Hindu Gods such as Lord Krishna, Ram and Sita, Lord Hanuman, Ganesha, Shiva Parvathi and Shivlingum were denigrated. The recording was redistributed as a DVD in 2006, ostensibly to educate Hindus about mass conversions to Christianity and to attract a section of the community to Islam (Premdev and Singh 2006: 1). This resulted in widespread condemnation from all religious groups, including Muslims. In 2007 Yousuf Deedat, son of Ahmed Deedat, founder of the IPCI, raised the ire of diverse religious groups when he distributed a booklet titled *Gandhi: A Stooge of the White South African Government*, which claimed that Gandhi was in favour of the oppression of indigenous Black people in South Africa. Gandhi, although a Hindu, continues to enjoy a celebrated stature amongst a wide section of the Muslim community in South Africa for championing freedom both in the country and on the Indian sub-continent (Naran 2007: 1).

Adherents of the Islamic religion have also been subjected to ridicule and denigration of their beliefs. The call for prayer (*Azaan)* has been contested by many non-Muslim religious groups, particularly in the former white residential areas, who perceived this as being invasive of their privacy and a public disturbance. Denigration of the daughter of Prophet Muhammed by a Mr Ramdhani raised the wrath of the Muslim community (Nair 2009: 3) as did the spiking of a pig's head on a mosque door in the rapidly desegregating residential suburb of Queensburgh (Group Writers South Africa 2012: 9). Such acts were strongly condemned by both Hindu and Christian religious groups, who called for tolerance and co-existence.In the previously all-white suburb of Malvern, a proposal by the newly established Muslim community to build a mosque attracted 578 objections to the eThekwini Municipality, mostly from white residents who were concerned that the call for prayer would disturb their peace (Naran 2004: 1). Hinduism was not spared this intolerance. In 2006, student Sunali Pillay was prohibited by formerly White Durban Girls' High School from wearing a nose stud, an affirmation of her religion and culture. The matter was contested before the Equality Court, resulting in a ruling that the school's actions were "arbitrary, unlawful, unreasonable and unjustifiable" which violated her constitutional rights (Group Writers South Africa 2006: 7).

Political events in India also have an effect on Hindu and Islamic sensitivities in the country. The desecration of the Babri Mosque in 1992 by members of the Hindu faith despite a 2010 settlement between the two religious groups which lead to the site being split into two by the Uttar Pradesh High Court created

anger among South African Muslims (Group Writers South Africa 2010: 21). The 2002 desecration of the Ayodhya Temple by Muslims in India raised serious tensions amongst the two faith groups, but this was quickly diffused by religious leaders (Ismial and Govender 2002: 1). In 2008 the Mumbai Massacre in which approximately 200 Hindu people were killed, raised the ire of South African Hindus but was strongly condemned by Muslim theological groups in the country (Group Writers South Africa 2008: 11).

The 9/11 bombing of the twin towers in New York City also resulted in claims by South African Muslims that there was heightened religious prejudice against Muslims despite the fact that it was undertaken by an extremist grouping (Moodley 2011: 3). Members of other religious groups in South Africa expressed the view that terrorism cannot be homogenised as Muslim only. Similarly, the publication of a cartoon of the Prophet Muhammed in Denmark in 2006 was condemned by all religious groups in South Africa. The South African Hindu Maha Sabha shared in the anger of the Muslim community at the insensitive depiction of the revered prophet (Naran 2006: 4).

TOWARDS TOLERANCE WITHIN THE RAINBOW NATION LANDSCAPE

South Africa has been dubbed the 'Rainbow Nation' post-liberation because of its diversity of cultures, racial groups and religious communities. Despite the fact that some 70 percent of South Africans are Christian, diverse religious groupings add colour to a country that has been fragmented by 350 years of exploitation, discrimination and intolerance through British colonialism and later apartheid. In the post-apartheid era, attempts are being made towards reconciliation and nation building by ensuring that all religious rights and beliefs are respected and guaranteed freedom of expression. A meeting convened by the African National Congress (ANC) Commission for Religious Affairs and the Forum for Religious Dialogue at the Research Institute for Theology and Religion at the University of South Africa in 2006 asserted:

We [South Africans] are no longer Hindus from India, Buddhists from Tibet, Muslims from the Far or Middle East, Bahais from Persia, Jews from Europe, Communists from Russia,
Cuba or China, or agnostics flaunting different schools of philosophy" .... Religion must be for peace and human welfare (Naran 2006: 4).

In 2011, the National Inter-Faith Council of South Africa (NIFC-SA) was formed. This was an amalgamation of the National Religious Leaders' Forum (NRLF) and National Inter-faith Leadership Council (NILC) in which Hindu and Islamic religious groups are adequately represented. The NIFC-SA is a state-led initiative with provincial structures which hopes to work in partnership with different levels of government to help build a better country. This can be viewed as the state's project to work with faith based organisations on certain critical challenges that it faces in developing the country. Religious-based groups are close to the masses of people with strong grass-roots links and can help the state to deal with poverty, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, crime and nation building through religious unity, tolerance and harmony. Both the Hindu and Islamic religious groups aim to place the rights of minority religious groups in the country on the agenda. Issues such as recognition of Diwali and Eid as public holidays, recognition of religiously ordained marriages, the promotion of language and culture, protection from religious intolerance and the preservation of their cultural heritage are some of the concerns that this religiously united front hopes to achieve for the Indian community at large within the context of a maturing democracy.

CONCLUSION

This article has shown that despite the heterogeneous nature of the Hindu and Islamic Indian religious groups characterised by class, language, ethnicity, customs and traditions, in their early years of evolution as a diaspora under British colonialism, considerable efforts were made to preserve religious identity. However, under apartheid and the partitioning of India, both religious groups took strain and this has impacted negatively on their efforts to co-exist as a united diaspora. Intolerance was fuelled by religious extremists who sought to capitalise on the apartheid regime's divisive strategy to assert hegemony. The legacy of apartheid has led to weak religious cohesion, particularly amongst those of indentured origin as compared with their trading class counterparts. The former found it more difficult to re-establish themselves

following the negative effects of forced removals. Many succumbed to the influence of westernisation and, particularly amongst Hindus, conversion to Christianity. But apartheid also led to both religious groups coalescing into different forms of organised religion which set the foundation for them to face post-apartheid challenges as minority religious communities.

The article also highlights the fact that although the two religious groups have mutually supported each other on common religious principles of co-existence and tolerance, on occasion they are confronted with certain contestations both within the diaspora as a whole and by international events, especially on the Indian sub-continent and in other diasporic communities globally. Despite this, the level of religious associational life has matured over the years and these contestations are generally dealt with peaceably so that people can take on new and emerging challenges in the democratic era. The level of organisation of both religious groups, despite certain historical differences, provides new opportunities to engage with an emerging South African way of life characterised by religious diversity which in the past has been isolated from dialogue and co-existence across religious lines.

NOTES

[1]   This book has since been edited by Sultan Khan and Lubna Nadvi and will be published shortly by UNISA Press as *(De)Monopolising Paradise*. The book promotes interfaith dialogue and tolerance and is grounded in an analysis of *Quranic* texts that demystify the notion that Islam as a religion cannot co-exist with other co-religions.

[2]   His official name was Sheik Allie Vulle Ahmed and he came to be known as *Hadrat* Badsha Pir (King of the Guides) due to a belief that he possessed mystical powers and his stature in providing spiritual support to the first generation of Muslims in the country. He is known to have originated from Chittoor, Madras and is highly revered by Muslims, as well as Hindus. A mausoleum stands in his honour in the City of Durban.

[3]   The *Deobandi* school of thought originated in India and was imported to South Africa based on a philosophy to promote a "pure" strand of Islam founded on the Quran and teachings of the Prophet Muhammed. It generated a rethink on an Islamic way of life, and the relevance and significance of certain cultural and religious practices amongst Muslims. By the 1970s this new religious outlook began taking form at an institutional level and was a source of immense polarisation within the wider Muslim community. The *Deobandi* school of thought, as well as the *Tablighis*, who are regarded as synonymous although their origins

differ, denounced practices such as sending communal salutations to the Prophet, hosting *Urs* and *Meelads* and visiting shrines. The mosque became the battle ground for religious contestations between two broad camps, *Barelvi* and *Deobandi* with the former predominantly drawing support from Muslims of indentured extraction and the latter, Gujarati speaking passenger Muslims (Vahed, 2003: 51-52).

[4]   In many places one would find incomplete places of worships because many donors insist that the mosque subscribe to a particular ideology, thus leading to conflict. Among Hindus, certain families have taken the opportunity to establish temples on property within their residences with a strong leaning towards a particular strand of religious belief.

[5]   Many Muslims, particularly those belonging to the *Deobandi*/Tablighi school of thought have re-asserted their dress code in recent years, resulting in both men and women (including veiling the face) being attired in traditional Islamic dress to represent their sense of religious identity. Amongst Hindus, the traditional Sari, though still worn by the older generation, is less popular amongst younger people except during special religious occasions. During organised faith based rituals and festivals, Hare Krishna devotees lead processions in the cities attired in their saffron-coloured robes.

[6]   For instance, among Muslims, townships, suburbs and towns became contested spaces for proselytisation of the Tablighi / *Deobandi* school of thought amongst Muslims of indentured origin who predominantly subscribe to the *Sunni* (*Barelwi*) school of thought. In the 1970s such contestations were heightened, resulting in violent confrontations over the governance of mosques. See Khan (2009) for a detailed discussion of this.

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