Perceptions of Different Generations of South African Hindus of Indian Origin towards Religiosity?

Nirmala Gopal

Criminology, School of Applied Human Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal,
Durban 4041, South Africa
E-mail: gopal@ukzn.ac.za

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ABSTRACT The aim of this study was to explore similarities and differences of various generations of Hindus of Indian Origin towards religiosity. Participants were sixty-six individuals identified through snowball sampling. Data were collected using questionnaires with data analysed either using SPSS or through themes generated from the open ended response. Chi square tests for independence (with Yates Continuity Correction) indicated significant associations between educational level and religiosity gender and knowing religious texts, age and attire when visiting places of worship and the fourth generation of Hindus being more religious than the first , second and third generations.

INTRODUCTION

Wieting (1975) maintains that in Ivan Turgenev's classic, Fathers and Sons; we find an enduring theme of world literature on the relationship between generations. A recurrent focus of social philosophy since Plato's Republic has been the threat to society posed by the possibility that the young might not adopt the essential wisdom and values of that society. Auguste Comte considered the action of one generation on the other as a central question in the study of society and the salience of this topic remains for contemporary sociological theory. The artistic, the philosophical and the sociological concern with generational issues are easy to understand. If a society is to continue its existence beyond one generation the members must transmit what they consider to be necessary knowledge and values. The continuity of a social system by definition requires transmission between generations. Frosh (2004) argues that in the post-modern world policy-makers, academics and professionals are becoming increasingly aware that religious beliefs and practices appear to play a significant part in the life of many people. Religious beliefs and practices do not appear to be disappearing as predicted; rather the meaning of religion is altering (Blasi 2002; Pargament et al. 2005; Voas and Crockett 2005). Pargament et al. (2005) argue that the paradigm of religion is varying from one that included the institution to one that focuses more on human potential with an increase in forms of

religiousness away from religious institutions: in other words 'believing without belonging' (Davie 1994; Voas and Crockett 2005). If this is the case it is inevitable that religious beliefs and practices whether focusing on the beliefs themselves or practices including active membership of a faith community have influenced and will continue to influence family life (Mahoney et al. 2001; Mercer 2004). Howath et al. (2008) argue that the influence of religious beliefs and practices on family life is particularly significant in adolescence with the young person developing their own identity 'world view' and beliefs. This overlaps particularly with the cognitive and emotional changes of adolescence and with social changes and cultural practices which may find a focus through religious practices including rites of passage.

According to an OMG (short form for Oh My God) report, which is one of the most popular expressions used by young people communicating by e-mail, instant message or cell phone text messaging, "If the Baby Boom was characterized as a "generation of seekers." their offspring Generation Y is a "generation of individuals." Their parents sowed the seeds of the triumph of individuality and their children see themselves as having the freedom to figure out who they are to explore their relationship with God and spirituality and to determine their place in society. This generation is characterized by open mindedness and tolerance believing that people should do their own thing even if it seems strange to others. For many pursuing the Amer-

ican Dream simply means "doing whatever I want." The report also maintains that this generation could be - and has been – described as directionless, lacking in community ties and meaningful participation in communal life and builds a more nuanced understanding of this generation revealing that Generation Y does seek community and meaningful involvement although often in informal and non-traditional ways. Religious faith and commitment is one route by which young people find meaning, value and community although their religious pluralism complicates what this looks like in practice. The diversity of Generation Y and the informality of much of their religious participation make it difficult to say that there is any one way that religion works in young people's lives. In South Africa little is known about how the different generations of PIO's perceive religiosity yet religious ideas and perspectives have the potential to profoundly influence many aspects of life including how living a life with values that promote healthy living. This is particularly relevant with increasing diversity of religious affiliations in contemporary South African society since Hinduism has been an important part of Hindu life since the arrival of Indians to South Africa as indentured labourers. In the words of ex-president Nelson Mandela 'the Hindu religion is one of the great world religions actively practiced and propagated in South Africa for over a century contributing to the spiritual and moral development of our people" (South African Hindu Maha Sabha (SAHMS) 2010). Mandela acknowledged the Indian community for their Hindu solidarity and tenacity as a religious and cultural group.

Hinduism Background

The ancient Sanskrit text *Rig Veda* divides Hindu society into four caste groups, *Brahmins* (priests), *Kshatriyas* (warriors), *Vaishyas* (cultivators) and *Shudras* (peasants) (Leach 1971) (Quoted in Gopal 2012). Hindus are said to have been created by a supreme being *Purusha* (God) from whose brain emerged *Brahmins,* from his forearms emerged *Kshatriyas,* from his abdomen emerged the *Vaishyas* and from his feet emerged the *Shudras.* A fifth group comprises of *Dalits, achuta,* or untouchables who are considered too polluted to rank as worthy beings (Berreman 1979) (Quoted in Gopal 2012). The

development and contributions of the Hindu community in the South African context prior to 1994 and post 1994 when the religious communities of South Africa were served by a national law (state law), which purported to be secular, but also by the customs and traditions of religious communities also known as non-state law have been recognised through the works of Knapp and Bridgraj (1990), Desai and Vahed (2009), Sookraj (2013), Singh (2012) and the South African Hindu Maha Sabha (SAHMS) (2010). Desai and Vahed (2009) maintain that "Under colonial rule. 'Hindu' referred to what was in reality 'a wide field of South Asian religious discourses and ritual practices: To say that someone is Hindu is to specify very little about the person's religion.' The indentured and their descendants instituted a range of customs, traditions. beliefs and values in Natal. These were not simply inherited and transplanted from India but often refashioned in a fluid and complex situation. It is not unusual given this rich religious history that the Hindu community has come to occupy a significant place among the minority religious groups in South Africa".

Commenting on the Vedic Tradition or Hinduism Knapp (1990) maintains that it "is not merely a religion but a way of life, a complete philosophy based on Universal Spiritual Truths which can be applied to anyone at any time". Hinduism recognizes that there is one Supreme Being with no beginning or end, the all in all, the unlimited Absolute Truth which can expand into many forms and That Supreme Being is found in the spiritual realm but also lives in the heart of all living beings. In the Hindu Primer, Hinduism is known as a family of faiths that upholds a wide array of perspectives on the Divine. The most prevalent expression of worship for the Hindu comes as devotion to God and the Gods. In the Hindu pantheon there are said to be three hundred and thirty-three million Gods. Hindus believe in one Supreme Being. The plurality of Gods is perceived as divine creations of that one Being. So, Hinduism has one supreme God, but it has an extensive hierarchy of Gods. Many people look at the Gods as mere symbols, representations of forces or mind strata, or as various Personifications generated as a projection of a man's mind onto an impersonal pure Beingness.

Controversially many Hindus have been told over and over that the Gods are not really beings but merely symbols of spiritual matters and

unfortunately many have accepted this erroneous notion about the Gods. Yet in reality the *Mahadevas* are individual soul beings and down through the ages ordinary men and women, great saints and sages, prophets and mystics in all cultures have inwardly seen, heard and been profoundly influenced by these super conscious inner plane beings. Lord Ganesha is such a being who can think just as human beings can think. He can see and understand and make decisions - so vast in their implications and complexity that human beings could never comprehend them with their human faculties and understanding. Visiting a Hindu temple, receiving the *shakti* from the majestic Gods of the Hindu religion can altogether change the life of an individual.

The classes into which society was divided were sanctified by religion. The architecture of Indian temples therefore cannot be divorced from religion. The men who built the temples did not erect them as exercises in the science of building. The main purpose in their thinking in the art of building temples was to teach men and women the great truths about the Universe. In South Africa the building of various temples began around 1900. The temple as a sanctified place of worship has been an integral part of the religious life of the Hindus from time immemorial. When the first Indians migrated to South Africa they brought the intrinsic values and images of temples with them (Bridjraj 1998; Maharaj 2012; Sookragh 2012. South African Hindu Maha Sabha 2012). In the early days of indenture a small temple or shrine was set in a yard under the shade of some trees or near a river. With the passage of time these temples began to assume greater dimension in structure and construction when local groups combined and pooled their resources. By the beginning of the 20th century elaborate structures, "replicas of the architecture of temples of the Motherland," dotted the South African landscape. The SAHMS realised that temples as centres of worship could play an important role in spreading religious knowledge and as a place for the observance of festivals. The *Shakti* alters the flow of the *pranas* or life currents within his body. It draws his awareness into the deeper *chakras*. But the change is slow. He lives with the experience for months and months after his visit to the temple. The devotee comes to know and love the Deity. Theosophists later popularized, however inaccurately, many Hindu concepts and paved the way for the arrival of Swami Vivekananda and Paramahansa Yogananda. Today increasing numbers of non-Hindu Americans accept reincarnation, some simplified version of the Advaita philosophy, the non-duality of self and God and the belief that there are countless paths to Truth.

Religion and Indentured Indians in South Africa

According to the South African Hindu Maha Sabha although the majority of Indians who first came into the country over 150 years ago by and large were unable to read and write they had some knowledge of the treasure house of their religion, culture and traditions. The stories of the Ramayana, Mahabharata, the Gita and numerous other epics were transmitted via the oral tradition. They celebrated Hindu festivals with great deal of colour and pageantry. In spite of experiencing a life of hardship and continuous struggle they strived to improve the lives of the next generation. They built state aided schools, temples and established *pathshalas* for teaching of the mother tongue. The formation of the South African Hindu Maha Sabha as the national synod representing the cultural and religious aspirations of South Africa's Hindu community was the brainchild of an outstanding *Sannyasin* (monk) Swami Shankaranandaji Maharaj who visited South Africa at the invitation of the Arya Samaj movement in Natal. Swami Shankarananda who arrived in South Africa on the 4 October 1908 was a visionary of unique dedication to the cause of Hinduism (correctly known as Hindu Dharma). Swami Shankaranandji came to South Africa in 1907 to continue with the missionary work done by Shri Bhai Parmanand. Since his arrival he worked tirelessly for the cause of Hindu Dharma. He helped form Hindu organisations, revived Hindu festivals, resuscitated ancient Indian traditions and established vernacular schools. He inspired Hindus through his various lectures and discourses throughout the country. Under his dynamic leadership he convened the first South African Hindu Conference in May 1912. Three hundred delegates from forty-four Hindu institutions attended the conference. At this Conference the South African Hindu Maha Sabha was born with Swamiji as its first President. Swamiji's departure to India in 1913 left a vacuum resulting in a period of inac-

tivity until the arrival of Mehta Jaimini Swami Adhyanandji Pandit Rishi Ram and other missionaries who rekindled the spirit of Hinduism.

Bridjraj asserts that although the pioneering groups of Indians who were brought to South Africa under similar conditions to slavery their indomitable spirits ensured that the seeds of Hinduism were sown and nurtured over successive generations with the same care as the lush sugarcane fields that began to thrive in the former British colony.

Bridjraj commenting in Hinduism Today (1998) mentions that "while South Africa is aptly referred to as a "rainbow nation" among the heterogeneous cacophony of cultural and religious persuasions that has become rooted in South African soil. Hinduism still commands a proud and substantive following. The nectar of Hinduism is being quaffed by whites and indigenous black South Africans who have come to embrace it." In the apartheid years Sooklal (1991) maintains that very few opportunities existed for the mastering of Hindu languages and scriptures and was the time when Indian languages were marginalised in the school curriculum.

For many Hindu youth the country's integration process—particularly at schools and universities—has witnessed them being exposed to diverse cultural influences making it sometimes challenging to retain and maintain their Hindu religious identity Bridgraj (1998) claims that "Religious leaders parents and apathetic youth—some of whom openly confess to being "embarrassed" about lending support to or participating in Hindu arts and cultural festivals—must share responsibility for this unfortunate state of affairs."

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on face-to-face interviews conducted with 66 respondents in Kwa-Zulu-Natal who were selected through snowball sampling across the greater Durban area. There were 21 males aged between 18 and 55 and 39 females also aged between 18 and 55 who had participated in the study. Interviews were conducted at a mutually arranged venue and each interview lasted on average an hour. All interviews were conducted in English. Since participation in the study was dependent on availability and willingness the study is limited in terms of the views of the participants. The findings of this study are therefore not generalizable. Questions were facilitated by a structured interview schedule which focused on issues regarding participants' perceptions of Hinduism. Using SPSS 21 the responses were analysed. Chi square tests for independents (with Yates Continuity Correction) were used to analyse the associations between the biographic and the religiosity-related items.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Biographical Details

Of the sixty-six participants in the study 43 were female and 23 were male. Eighteen belonged to the fourth generation PIO's born in South Africa four from the second generation twelve third and three fifth generations. Twenty-nine respondents did not answer the question Seventeen of the participants were from Tamil speaking backgrounds Forty- five from Hindi speaking backgrounds two Telegu and two Gujarati. Twenty-seven of the respondents were university undergraduate students. Twenty- seven had primary school education five had secondary school education and nine stated other.

Trends in Gender Versus the Importance of Knowing Religious Texts

$X^2(1.n=66)=3.86. p=0.05. phi =0.24$
  Distribution of "YES" responses:
1)   40% (n = 22) males
2)   60% (n =33) females

As far as knowing religious texts is concerned there is a significant association with gender (p =0.05). Inspecting the number of responses it can noted that more females (n= 33; 60 %) than males (n=22; 40%) responded positively to this item in the religiosity scale.

Age vs. the Importance of Wearing Proper Religious Code when Visiting Religious Sites

$X^2 (7. n=66)=17.02. p=0.017. phi=0.51$
Distribution of "YES" responses:
  1) between ages 18 and 21 : *n=22 (36.7%)*
[YES] Youngest respondents
  2) between age 51 and 55   : n=2 (3.3%)
[YES] Oldest respondents
  3) other age group respondent numbers ranged from 5 to 9.

There is a significant association between age and religious dress code when visiting religious sites (p<0.05). Mostly respondents between ages 18 and 21 (n=22; 36.7%) agreed that religious dress is important when visiting religious sites. These are the youngest respondents in the sample. Of the oldest respondents (age 51 and 55) only 3.3% (n=2) responded positively.

Place of Birth vs. Time Attending Religious Workshop

X^2 (2.n=66)=7.43. p=0.024. phi=0.34
Distribution of "YES" responses:
 Durban (urban) 69.6% (n=39) (Daily)
Other: 30.4% (n=17)
    (Daily) 42.9% (n=3) (Weekly) 57.1% (n=4) 100 % (n=3) Monthly)

When looking at the relationship between place of birth and frequency of attending places of religious worship there is a significant association between these two items (p<0.05). More (n=39 ;69.6%) respondents born in the greater Durban (urban) area reported attending religious places of worship on a daily basis whilst only 17 (30.4%) from other areas attended daily.

Specific Generation of Indian versus Consider Oneself to be Religious

X^2 (3.n=37) =9.34. p=0.025.phi=0.503
Distribution of "YES" response :
    1) 4th generation: 54.5% (n=18) [YES]
      2) 3rd generation: 24.2% (n=8))
[YES] 3) 2nd generation: 12.1 %(n=4)
[YES] 4) 5th generation: 9.1% (n=3)

There is a significant association between respondents knowing the generation which they belong to and considering themselves to be religious (p<0.05). Of the 37 respondents   18 (54.5%) belonging to the fourth generation considered themselves to be religious. On the other hand 8 (24.2%) belonging to the third generation and 4 (12.1%) from the second generation claimed to be religious.

Specific Generation of PIO versus Importance of Reading Religious Texts

X^2 (3. n=37) =12.04. p=0.007. phi=0. 57
Distribution of "YES" responses:
1) 4th generation: 56.3% (n=18) YES;

2)3rd generation: 21.9% (n=7) YES;
3)2nd generation: 12.5 %(n=4) YES
4)5th generation: 9.4% (n=3)

Respondents who knew the generation they belong to is significantly associated with the importance of reading religious text (p< 0.05). Again respondents from the fourth generation (n= 18; 56.3%) seem to have emphasized the importance of reading religious texts. For third generation respondents 7 (21.9%) emphasised the importance of reading religious texts whilst only 4 (12.5%) indicated the importance of reading religious texts.

Education Level versus Worshipping a Deity or Follower

X^2 (3. n=65) =12.21. p=0.007. phi =-0.43
      Distribution of "YES" responses:
1) 54.1% (n=20)of respondents with primary education worship a deity 25% (n=7) worship a follower; 2)respondent with tertiary education: 60.7% (n=17) worship a follower. 18.9% (n=7) worship a deity.

There is a significant association between education level and worshipping a deity or follower (p<0.05). Of the 66 respondents 20 (54.1%) with primary education worship a deity whilst 7 (25%) worship a follower. On the other hand 17 (60.7%) worship a follower whilst 7 (18.9%) worship a deity.

Education Level versus Being a Member of a Religious Organization

X^2 (3.n =66) = 10.35.   p=0.016. phi =0.40
Distribution of "YES" responses:
 1)48.1% (n=26) with 1° educ –members of a religious group
2) 29.6% (n=16) with 3°
3) 9.3% (n=5)   with 2°
4) 12.1 %(n=7)

Further there is a significant association between education level and membership of religious organization (p<0.05). Twenty-six (48.1%) of the respondents with primary education are members of religious organisations whilst 16 (29.6%) with tertiary education and 5 (9.3%) with secondary education belong to religious organisations. On the other hand, 7(12.1%) with "other" education level are members of religious organisations.

Education Level versus Importance of Reading Religious Texts

X^2 (3 .n =66) = 8.59.   p=0.035. phi =0.36
Distribution of "YES" responses :
 1) 46.6% (n=27) with 1° educ – reads religious text
 2) 32.8% (n=19) with 3°
 3) 8.6% (n=5) with 2°
    4)12.1 %(n=7) Other

A significant association is present between education level and reading of religious texts (p<0.05). Twenty-seven (46.6%) with primary education have indicated that they read religious text; 19(32.8%) with tertiary education and 5(8.6%) with secondary education have stated that they read religious text. Further 7(12.1%) with "other" levels of education have indicated that they read religious text.

Marital Status versus Membership of Religious Organizations

X^2 (4 .n =66) = 10.2. p=0.037. phi =0.39
Distribution of "YES" responses:
1)   46.3% (n = 25) single respondents
2)   40.7% (n = 22) married respondents
3)   9.3% (n =5) deserted respondents
4)   3.7% (n = 2) divorced respondents

There is a significant association between marital status and membership of a religious organizations (p<0.05). Twenty-five (46.3%) respondents who are single and 22 (40.7%) who are married indicated being members of religious organizations whilst 5(9.3%) deserted respondents and 2 (3.7%) divorced ones stated that they were members of religious organizations.

Marital Status versus School or Home

X^2 (12 .n =66)= 26.96. p=0.008. phi =0.64
Distribution of "YES" responses:
 1) 47.8% (n=22) married respondents
 2) 39.1% (n=18) single respondents

The association between marital status and school or home is significant (p<0.05). Twenty-two (47.8%) of married respondents agreed on religious education being conducted either at school or at home whilst 18 (39.1%) of single respondents preferred the school for religious education.

Data generated through the open-ended questions are presented but it should be em-phasised from the outset that it is not possible to generalise from the sample whether some opinions were specifically related to the response of a particular generation. What the study provides are the views of different generation of young people parents and grandparents from various generations' language groups and educational levels living in the greater KwaZulu Natal municipality.

As a starting point respondents were asked: *"What value do you attach to Hinduism"?*

Respondents maintained "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".(Generation 2)

 This finding is contrary to those cited by Khan from research undertaken by Schoombee and Mantzaris (1985). Hoffmeyer (1995) who 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 South Africa a new sense of religiosity is emerging amongst the 4th and 5th generation Hindu Indians. This may be attributed to many reasons – the political social and economic integration of South Africa including India the free movement of South African Indians to the land of origin the role of organised religion based on different linguistic groups and access to religious literature in the language of the of devotees.

Interestingly on the question as to whether respondents believe that many South African Hindus have become westernized a 33.3% of the respondents felt strongly that this was the case. Interestingly this finding does not corroborate with the earlier question that seeks to determine the fundamental belief structures of respondents about Hinduism wherein the vast majority subscribed to the basic tenets and principles underlying the faith. However it might be argued that the reason for such a divergent view point may perhaps be attributed to the fact that being westernised does not necessarily mean that one does not derived spiritual meaning from religious associational life. Westernisation or modernity is a contested concept. It does not necessarily mean that traditional value systems cannot co-

exist with perceived western or modern systems. Being westernised or modern can represent many things. Responses such as:

"our dress code and language has changed" "bad habits such as drinking smoking, pregnancy before marriage"; " religion is becoming commercialized and especially the traditional dress and attire"; and "one is ashamed and drift away from traditions" (Generation 4).

In itself suggests different notions and understanding of what it is to be westernised or modern. One respondent in the study perhaps appropriately attests that Hinduism is a:

"religion that is fluid and socially constructed and therefore it is constantly changing" (Generation1)

This encapsulates the essence of the religion which does not have rigid boundaries and is open to change adaptation and degrees of co-existence with other religious cultural and social influences without crossing the boundaries of the fundamental aspects of the belief structure.

On the question as to whether South African youth are significantly involved in promoting religion the response was not altogether in the affirmative. Responses such as:

"many are ashamed"; "they lack interest" "not sufficiently"; "the younger generation is westernizing 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"; (Generation 2 and 3)

"No. youngsters nowadays have better things to do and prefer socializing rather than promoting religion" (Generation 1 and 4)

are some examples of respondent's perception of youth and their engagement with their religion. On the other hand positive responses such as:

"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 religious have youth groups which allows youngsters to promote their religion"; "most youngsters are very involved we have religious groups in my area and children are taught about Hinduism"; and "many boys are taught to become priests at a young age" (Generation 3 and 4) strongly sug-

gests that a segment of the present generation of Hindu youth in South Africa display positive affiliation and affinity for their religion. However such a finding needs to be treated with caution for the simple reason the study does not analyse other variables such as educational levels and class as a factor that may influence respondent's perceptions on youth religiosity. Considering the fact that religious associational life amongst the South African Indian Diaspora has matured since the dark days of apartheid they are more than likely to reach out to the present and younger generation of youth. However in the post-democratic South Africa Hindu languages of different regions from the sub-continent no longer features in the schooling curriculum and is considered a private matter. Hence the role of organized religion through youth programmes and projects appears to compensate for the vacuum left behind within the public schooling system. This finding suggests that with a concerted effort from religious associational life within the Hindu faith group the next generation of devotees enjoy the prospect of preserving belief structure value system and code of life.

CONCLUSION

Interpretations of the study findings need to be considered in the context of the studies limitations. First while the respondents used in the present study provided sufficient information to identify some perceptions of different generations of Hindus towards religiosity the sampling method namely snowball sampling precluded any detailed analysis of patterns and trends regarding specific generations. Second the limitation in sample size and location namely KwaZulu Natal does not allow generalizability to Hindus PIO's in other provinces South Africa.

The present findings do however suggest that fourth generation Hindu PIO's are actively involved in religion and this is important in their lives. Further reading religious texts wearing appropriate dress when visiting religious sites and belonging to religious organisations are also growing trends among the fourth generation which represents a meaningful age group in terms of continuity. The findings of this study recommend the replication and expansion of the present findings.

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