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The Role of Visiting Indian Hindu Missionaries in their Attempts to ‘Reform’ Hinduism in South Africa, 1933–1935

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Abstract

This paper aims to add to our understanding of the cultural exchanges that took place between people of far away communities during the early twentieth century by looking at a few visiting Hindu missionaries in South Africa. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, Hindu Arya Samaj missionaries began arriving in the country to propagate Hinduism and promote the reformist message. While the work of travelling Hindu missionaries in other places where Hindus settled in large numbers is well documented, much less is known about their work in South Africa. This paper tries to fill that void by looking at a few missionaries and the ideas that they tried to communicate in a particular period in the history of Hindus in South Africa. These missionaries who travelled across the globe and conducted lectures, formed religious institutions and worked with existing institutions in their attempts to propagate the Hindu religion, were very popular in South Africa and thousands attended the lectures that they conducted throughout the country. They were also crucial in motivating local Hindu leaders to establish bodies to unite the very heterogeneous group of Hindus and overcome sectional divisions. However, once they departed the enthusiasm shown soon disappeared and organisations that sought to unite Hindus fell into periods of inactivity. Looking at one period in which there were a few Hindu missionaries in the country together, this paper looks at the message that they tried to communicate, how they saw the position of Hindus and Indians in South Africa and address some of ways in which South Africans responded to the missionaries.

Key words: Hindu missionaries; South Africa; Arya Samaj; South African Hindu Maha Sabha; identity; Hindu diaspora

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Hindu missionaries in South Africa

The role of travelling Hindu missionaries in the various colonies that indentured Indians settled in large numbers is well documented. They played an important role in the development of Hindu cultural bodies, secular, vernacular and religious schools as well as anti-colonial political bodies. However, much less has been written about their influence in South Africa. The work of the first two Hindu missionaries to arrive in the country and the tensions that they exposed between both reformist-minded Hindus and those participating in populist practices that reformists condemned, as well as between Hindus and Christian and Muslim Indians, has been addressed in a few historical studies dealing with indentured Indians. However, the role of the other missionaries who visited thereafter has been neglected apart from one publication funded by a local reformist Hindu organisation and written by a travelling Hindu missionary who settled permanently in South Africa. This information has been reproduced in other celebratory publications produced by local Hindu bodies and cited in some academic works. However, there has been no critical study dealing with the work of these Hindu missionaries or their influence on South African Hindus. Consequently there remain various unanswered questions about their influence and the ideas and ideals that they tried to communicate. This paper aims to describe exactly what kinds of messages a few missionaries lecturing in the country at the same time tried to communicate and how they contextualised the position of South African Hindus, as well as to address some of the ways in which their South African audience was selective in their adoption of these ideas. While the message of a glorious Hindu past was one that resonated with the masses, many of their reformist tendencies had little impact on the practices of the vast majority of Hindus, and the call to unite Hindus into one body as many of these missionaries called for was often abandoned soon after their departure.

This is the case with the missionaries discussed in this paper whose countrywide lectures helped to draw support for the revival of the then dormant national body for Hindus, in 1934. After their departure at the end of that year however, the organisation fell into

6. Regardless of the attempts by reformers, local and travelling missionaries to put an end to populist Hindu practices, the majority of South African Hindus practiced since the indenture period and continue to practice today, forms of worship and celebrate ceremonies condemned by reformers. For a description of
dormancy again until the arrival of another missionary a few years later. In this way South Africa differed to other places with large Hindu populations where large reform-orientated Hindu bodies emerged and expanded, shortly after the arrival of travelling missionaries. Before discussing why uniting Hindus under the reformist banner in South Africa was so different, it is necessary to briefly describe one reformist Hindu movement in India whose missionaries travelled to propagate their reformist version abroad.

**Reform Hindu movements**

During the later years of the nineteenth century, faced with the pressures of colonial rule, influence of Christian missionaries and large numbers of illiterate and uneducated Indians, numerous reformist Hindu movements emerged in India to refine Hindu practice. Reformers were especially concerned with what they regarded as inherent weaknesses in Hindu practices which included the caste system, idolatry, unequal gender relations and the absence of textual or philosophical Hinduism in favour of ritual forms of worship, to name a few. In response they promoted a more reflective form of Hinduism free of such practices and placed an emphasis on education. The factors that instigated reform movements in India were also present in the plantation colonies where indentured labourers had settled. This included poverty, a high level of illiteracy as well as inadequate schools, and the absence of Hindu institutions. Of all these missionary movements the Arya Samaj founded in Bombay in 1895 by Swami Dayananda, was the most significant in sending missionaries to the colonies to preach, especially in the early years of settlement.

Hence, looking at the Arya Samaj missionaries who travelled abroad is vital in understanding the theme of interconnectivity that existed in places where Hindus settled in large numbers. In his study of Colombo (Sri Lanka), as part of a wider global ‘urban intelligentsias’ that transcended the Indian Ocean, Mark Frost makes reference to the importance of religious movements such as the Arya Samaj in the ‘cultural exchange and intellectual debates’ that took place between ‘learned elites’ across imperial cities or what he calls ‘cultural entrepôt’. Bilingual or multilingual Western-educated religious missionaries were vital in the exchange of ideas that took place wherever Hindus settled. Missionaries who travelled were particularly influential as they drew large crowds many of whom were illiterate and their influence can be seen in the organisation of large Hindu bodies after their arrival.


Arya Samajists saw themselves as missionaries whose task was to ensure the survival of Hinduism and promote the reformist version both in India and abroad.\(^\text{10}\) While the term missionary was originally coined to refer to French Jesuit priests who travelled to foreign lands to preach the word of the Bible, Arya Samajists saw it as their mission to preach to Hindus and prevent them from converting to other religions.\(^\text{11}\) Their mission was to propagate the knowledge contained in the ancient Indian religious texts known as the Vedas, to maintain a ‘Hindu heritage’ in the colonies. They were concerned that Hindus abroad were practising a form of Hinduism which they regarded as based on ‘blind superstitions’ and devoid of the ‘fundamental truths’ of Hinduism, which made them more likely to convert.\(^\text{12}\) Hence Arya Samaj missionaries travelled abroad to discourage such practices and promote Vedic teachings to enlighten Hindus about what they regarded as the true nature of Hinduism.

The arrival of a particular missionary in some instances led to an increase in militancy amongst youths or the development of bodies to establish schools and welfare centres.\(^\text{13}\) Their influence on the masses is crucial as they helped to foster a sense of pride and belonging to part of a ‘glorious’ Indian heritage and in South Africa thousands turned up to see their lectures and live demonstrations. Goolam Vahed in his study of Swami Shankaranand, the second Arya Samaj missionary to visit Natal, argues that the swami provided first form of leadership to the indentured and post indentured masses, most of whom were Hindu, and he highlights the swami’s role in promoting a Hindu consciousness. One of the earliest attempts at fostering a Hindu consciousness amongst the otherwise heterogeneous group of Hindus was when the swami mobilised over 2,000 thousand Hindus in Mayville in 1909 to demonstrate against the execution of two cows.\(^\text{14}\)

However, the influence of missionaries on South African Hindus differed from their influence elsewhere. In South Africa missionaries were also crucial to the development of institutional Hinduism but failed to have a long term impact. Parochial Hindu bodies flourished whereas those that sought to unite all Hindus or large groups of Hindus as the missionaries called for, quickly fell into inactivity after the missionaries left. Elsewhere however, the development and growth of political bodies under the Hindu banner followed shortly after the arrival of missionaries. In these overseas communities as in India, Arya Samaj bodies clashed with other Hindu bodies that represented the orthodox approach to Hinduism (Sanathan Dharma) and with Muslim and in some cases Christian bodies as well.\(^\text{15}\) During the early years of indenture, migrants practiced various traditions which were largely unorganised until the arrival of Arya Samaj missionaries who established reform bodies to unite all Hindus but when Sanathan preachers arrived later, tensions

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10. For a discussion and brief literature review on how the Arya Samaj movement in India borrowed homogenising and missionary vocabulary from Christianity and Islam to remodel a counter colonial Hindu movement in India see Kelly, *A Politics of Virtue*, 121–139.
emerged between both groups. In British Guyana and Mauritius for example, Hindu bodies aiming to unite all Hindus known as the Hindu Maha Sabha were established to promote Sanathanim as an alternative to the well-established Arya Samaj.\textsuperscript{16} The Fiji Hindu Maha Sabha, formed in 1926, was led by Arya Samajists, but in 1930 a faction that was unhappy with the organisation’s Arya Samaj orientation, broke away.\textsuperscript{17} The Fiji Maha Sabha was also a political organisation and clashed with the Muslim League and the leading orthodox Hindu body, the Sanathan Dharma.\textsuperscript{18} In places where Arya Samaj missionaries arrived after or alongside the Sanathanist missionaires like Guyana, Trinidad and Suriname, Maha Sabha’s emerged as national organisations dominated by Sanathanists and were, additionally, political organisations ‘which represented Hindus to non-Indian communities and government authorities’.\textsuperscript{19}

This was not the case in South Africa where Hindu bodies never became involved in politics, nor was there any comparable conflict between reformist and orthodox organisations. One possible reason for this is that Hindu leaders who were in a position to raise the money to bring missionaries from India were all reformist minded and chose to invite Arya Samaj missionaries, whereas in other places Sanathanist missionaries began arriving soon after or alongside that of the Arya Samaj.\textsuperscript{20} South Africa is also unique in that there were more migrants from South India (Tamil and Telugu) than North India (Hindi and Guajarati).\textsuperscript{21} This is important as the Arya Samaj, while aiming to unite India under the reformist Hindu banner, was nonetheless a North Indian movement and its leaders selected Hindi as the national language for India and for Hindus who lived abroad.\textsuperscript{22} While aiming to be universal the Arya Samaj was one of many approaches to Hinduism. In fact the Sanathan Dharma itself was also a North Indian movement and there are vast differences between North Indian and South Indian traditions, ceremonies and religious texts.\textsuperscript{23}

Another explanation for the difference is that in South Africa, Indians constituted an absolute minority, whereas in Fiji and Trinidad they constituted almost half the

\textsuperscript{16} Van Der Veer and Vertovec, ‘Brahmanism Abroad’, 160.
\textsuperscript{17} Kelly, A Politics of Virtue, 5, 202.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 90–91.
\textsuperscript{19} Van Der Veer and Vertovec, ‘Brahmanism Abroad’, 161.
\textsuperscript{20} For a discussion about Indian elites in South Africa see Kuper, Indian People, 44–80, and Swan, Gandhi, 16–18.
\textsuperscript{21} South Indian indentured migrants as a percentage of the total indentured population constituted 6.3 per cent in Fiji, 31.9 per cent in Mauritius, and 6.3 per cent in British Guiana. In Natal, it was 67.9 per cent: see B.V. Lal, ‘The Indenture System’, in B.V Lal, ed., The Encyclopedia of the Indian Diaspora (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2006), 46–52.
\textsuperscript{22} For founding principles of the Arya Samaj in Bombay see Singh, Life and Teachings, 103–104. The foreword to this book was written by Bhartendra Nath who argued that Swami Dayananda ‘realising that the Indian society’s drawback is its disunity and division, he gave the call of one God-Om, one religion Vedic Dharma, one scripture-Hindi, one caste Arya and one method-Sandhya’ (). However, some scholars, such as Vickie Langohr, have argued that the promotion of Hindi as the medium for understanding Hindu scriptures was an aim by Arya Samaj leaders in India as part of the Hindu nationalist drive to ‘unify the Hindu community and marginalise the “Muslim” language Urdu’: see V. Langohr, ‘Colonial Education Systems and The Spread of Local Religious Movements: The Cases of British Egypt and Punjab’, Comparative Studies in Society and History, 47 (2005), 161–189, 163.
\textsuperscript{23} See C. Kuppusami, Tamil Culture in South Africa (Durban: Rapid Graphic, 1993), 49, 50, 98.
population, and in Mauritius, which lacked an indigenous population, Indians came to constitute an overwhelming majority, and were in a position to contest for political control. In South Africa however, it made little sense to unite Hindus into a political force when certain Muslim and Christian Indians were also important political leaders. Due to laws targeting Indians specifically, fostering unity amongst Indians was crucial to political leaders who, given their wealth and status, were also leaders of religious bodies. An Indian rather than Hindu identity was emphasised by Indian political leaders and this impacted on how South Africans interpreted the missionaries. Hindu leaders in the organisations that the missionaries established were also important leaders in the secular political bodies and never ventured into the realm of politics in their capacity as leaders of Hindu organisations. Often when events transpired that affected Indians as a group, Hindu leaders became preoccupied with matters pertaining to politics and abandoned their role as Hindu leaders. This can be illustrated in a brief chronology of the organisation that aimed to unite all Hindus in South Africa.

**Homogenising Hinduism in South Africa**

A Master’s dissertation focusing on the early history (1912–1960) of the national body of Hindus, the South African Hindu Maha Sabha (henceforth Maha Sabha), documents the role that travelling Hindu missionaries played in arousing support for such a body. The Maha Sabha was defunct at various times and it was during visits of travelling missionaries when it was revived and local Hindu leaders took to the cause of promoting a Hindu consciousness. Two of the missionaries discussed in this paper were brought to Natal for the specific purpose of arousing the enthusiasm that many Hindu leaders felt was necessary to bring the Maha Sabha back to life in 1934. Therefore it is necessary to briefly account for the Maha Sabha’s history up to this point and the events that brought these missionaries to the country.

Before the arrival of Arya Samaj missionaries, there was no attempt at uniting Hindus or creating a unitary Hindu identity. Hindu migrants remained a heterogeneous group divided by caste, class, linguistic and sectional differences. This was to change in 1904 with the arrival of Prof Bhai Parmanand, the first Arya Samaj missionary to arrive in Natal under the invitation of local Hindu leader, Lala Mokamchand Varman who was concerned over-prevalence of ritual-orientated Hinduism. While establishing reform-orientated bodies

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24. There are few exceptions like in 1936 when Ms Sammy, a Hindu woman from prominent Hindu family converted to Islam to marry the Indian Agent General sent to South Africa, Sri Sayed Raza Ali who was Muslim. In protest Hindu members of the Natal Indian Congress threatened to resign as a form of protest. However, instances like this were very rare and issues which divided South African Indian political leaders were usually secular issues like the decision to participate in the South African government’s colonisation scheme. See S. Bhana, *Gandhi’s Legacy: The Natal Indian Congress 1894–1994* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1997).


26. Gandhi-Luthuli Documentation Centre (Hereafter GLDC), Arya Pratinidhi Sabha Collection (Hereafter APS), Minutes of 1933 APS Hindu Conference, 23 October 1933.
to unite Hindus, Parmanand spent less than a year in the country. His successor Swami Shankaranand, who arrived in 1908, picked up where he left off establishing many more bodies, and on 31 May 1912, he chaired the inaugural conference of South African Hindus in Durban, where the Maha Sabha was established to unite all Hindus and deal with the ‘common problems’ that its leaders felt all Hindus faced collectively. These common problems included a lack of state recognition for Hindu festivals and no religious or vernacular education for Hindu children combined with the presence of Christian missionaries and the prevalence of ritual forms of worship, which Hindu leaders felt made Hindus more likely to contemplate conversion. According to Maha Sabha council member B.D. Lalla, writing in 1960, the Maha Sabha was established when Swami Shankaranand convinced local Hindus that ‘that unless they co-ordinated their efforts, there was little hope for the survival of Hinduism which was threatened from all sides’. However, when the swami departed the following year on 31 May 1913, the Maha Sabha became defunct. The organisation was revived briefly in 1918 by members of Arya Samaj bodies in Natal including a South African born travelling missionary named Bhawani Dayal. However, the Maha Sabha only held two meetings before becoming defunct again, largely the result of Dayal’s departure to India in 1919 to represent South African Indians at an annual convention of the Indian National Congress. In 1925 when Arya Samaj bodies across the world celebrated the birth centenary of Swami Dayananda, an umbrella body called the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha (APS) was established with Dayal as its president, to unite all Natal Arya Samaj bodies. However, the passing of the Areas Reservation Bill later in 1925 meant that many Indian political leaders in South Africa, including Dayal, were sent to India to rally support against this bill. The fact that political leaders also tended to dominate the membership of religious organisations was detrimental to the latter. At the Round Table Conference in Cape Town in 1926/1927 between the Indian and South African governments, the question of repatriation and the difficulties faced by returning migrants, which took up the attention of Dayal who wrote a book on the subject, and the difficulties faced by Indians as a result of the Great Depression, all captured the attention

27. Although Swami Shankaranand was a proponent of the Arya Samaj, due to the heterogeneity of South African Hindus he dispelled that label Arya Samaj and claimed to represent the interests of all Hindus. The name Maha Sabha meaning ‘great society’ was selected as the name for this body. However, a list of the local leaders in the Maha Sabha showed that they also belonged to Arya Samaj bodies. For a list of these leaders see N.P. Desai, ‘A History of the South African Hindu Maha Sabha’, in R.S. Nowbath, S. Chotai and B.D. Lalla, eds, The Hindu Heritage in South Africa (Durban: The South African Hindu Maha Sabha, 1960), 91–95.


31. For example, an umbrella Tamil body aiming to unite all the Tamil bodies in the country was founded in 1924 with 22 affiliated bodies but it lost momentum when its secretary, P.R. Pather, and chairman, V.S.C. Pather went to Cape Town to attend the South African Indian Congress (SAIC) conferences. See Kuppusami. Tamil Culture, 49, 50, 98.
of leaders of these religious organisations. The result was that organisations that tried to unite Hindus were largely inactive.

The visit of international missionary Professor Ralaram of the Dayanand Anglo Vedic College, Hoshiarpur, India, who arrived on 8 February 1932, was an important turning point in once again sparking interest in a coordinating body. He came as guest of the Durban Arya Samaj in conjunction with M.C. Varman. He lectured throughout Natal, as well as the Transvaal and the Cape. Speaking in Johannesburg he urged the establishment of an umbrella Arya Samaj body to unite the existing Hindu institutions and to coordinate their activities. He warned that a ‘failure to unite would result in the loss in their Indian Identity’.

The professor departed in March 1933 after spending a year in the country. His call led to a number of meetings among Hindus which culminated in the formation of the Transvaal Hindu Seva Samaj (THSS) in 1933 to promote the ‘social, moral and religious upliftment of Hindus in the Transvaal’. One of the first tasks that it set for itself was to bring a lecturer from the Ramakrishna mission, Swami Adhyayananda, to South Africa to draw support for the THSS.

1933 was also the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Arya Samaj founder, Swami Dayananda, which was celebrated by the APS, which held a conference with Dayal as its president. One of the resolutions of the conference was to revive the dormant Maha Sabha and it was decided to bring Pandit Mehta Jaimini to lecture in the country and chair over a Hindu conference which Hindu leaders thought would create the support needed to bring the Maha Sabha back to life. While too complex to go into detail here, news about reviving the Maha Sabha attracted strong disapproval from some, including the editorial of the Indian Opinion over fears that it would spark religious sectionalism. Regardless,

33. ‘Professor Ralaram’, Indian Opinion, 19 February 1932.
34. Vedalankar, Religious Awakening, 54.
36. Indian Opinion, 2 February 1934.
37. GLDC, APS, 23 October 1933, and see ‘A General Meeting of the Maha Sabha’, Indian Opinion, 5 January 1934.
38. In two articles, the Indian Opinion voiced strong disapproval arguing that the Maha Sabha would create communal divisions in South Africa like the All Hindu Mahasabha was doing in India. Indian Opinion editor, Manilal Gandhi may have opposed the Maha Sabha due to his opposition to its leaders who were also part of the Natal Indian Congress which chose to participate in the South African Government’s Colonisation Scheme whereas Manilal was part of a breakaway group to oppose it. The All Hindu Mahasabha in India was in opposition to Manilal’s father, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi at this time and the South African Hindu Maha Sabha’s founder Swami Shankaranand was also Gandhi’s adversary during his South African stay. Manilal was probably opposed to a South African version of the Maha Sabha for similar ideological reasons to his father. See ‘The Hindu Maha Sabha’, Indian Opinion, 5 May and 14 May 1934, and Gopalan, ‘Caste, Class and Community’, 81–83.
however, the conference took place with Swami Adhyahananda brought from the Transvaal by the prospective leaders of the Maha Sabha and Pandit Jaimini taking part – two missionaries who the Indian Opinion held in high esteem.

The Maha Sabha ‘revival’ conference

The Maha Sabha held its third South African Hindu conference at the Durban Town Hall on 27 May 1934. The conference attracted delegates from 62 institutions from Natal, the Cape and the Transvaal, which was the largest gathering of Hindu institutions in the country at that stage. B.M. Patel, chairman of the reception committee, claimed that such a gathering was ‘unprecedented in the annals of the South African Indians’ and that the presence of representatives from all provinces showed that the Maha Sabha’s ‘representative character was unquestionable’.39 One factor that ensured a large turnout was the presence of the two Hindu missionaries whose countrywide lectures had proved extremely popular. The widely travelled and highly experienced Pandit Mehta Jaimini presided over the conference, while the first representative of the Ramakrishna Mission to arrive in South Africa, Swami Adhyahananda gave the opening address. The Deputy Mayor of Durban, Councillor S.K. Elgie, said in his opening address that ‘it showed a fine spirit when delegates came forward in large numbers as they have done in the interests of a useful movement of this kind’.40

Swami Adhyahananda criticised those who described Hinduism as a medley of thoughts without an ‘underlying unity’ by arguing that Hinduism was ‘the perennial source of solace’ for those seeking truth.41 Hinduism, however, did not believe in the doctrine that a particular theological belief or form of worship was ‘the only way towards light and salvation’.42 He censured those who promoted competition between religions and argued that just as there was diversity in nature, there was unity in the different thoughts and experiences that made up the different religions. He criticised proselytisation for exacerbating the tension that existed in the world.

Pandit Jaimini, who followed, described South Africa as the ‘motherland’ of Hinduism’s future, and he outlined some steps that the Maha Sabha should take to ensure that Hinduism flourished. He called on the body to send young Hindus to Japan, Germany and England to acquire an industrial education to help in the fight against poverty and unemployment, which he said should be a central aim of the Maha Sabha. This is hardly surprising as the conference took place in the midst of the Great Depression when thousands of Indians were relying on soup kitchens for their survival.43 Pandit Jaimini also emphasised the importance of vernacular education and the revival of ancient Indian culture, which he claimed were necessary for ‘national solidarity’ in this country. He

40. Ibid.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid.
43. See A. Desai and G. Vahed, Monty Naicker: Between Reason and Treason (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter, 2010), 49–63.
stressed the importance of educating girls and called on the Maha Sabha to increase the popularity of festivals such as Ramnavami and Janam Ashtmi which honours the birth of the popular Hindu deities, Rama and Krishna, respectively. The pandit believed that festivals and the recognition of ‘national heroes’ were important for generating a sense of patriotism. He added that Vir Ashtmi (festival of heroes) should be observed as well, so that ‘Indian youths and other Indian athletes can display their skill by adopting Olympic Games and other kinds of gymnastics’. He cited Japan and Russia as examples of patriotism that South African Hindus would do well to emulate. The pandit called on Hindu youths to

arise, awake, cast off the spirit of lethargy, come forward with feeling hearts, aspirations of patriotism and honest ambitions. Be good citizens of this land where you were born and brought up and be faithful to your motherland and her culture.

He emphasised the idea of being both South African and yet attached to India. While wanting Hindus to be good citizens in South Africa, the pandit reminded them that they were part of the ‘Hindu nation’, adding that ‘no nation on Earth can vie with the Hindus in respect of their antiquity in civilisation and religion’ and exclaiming his frustration that a nation that was ‘a teacher and initiator of the whole world’ has become ‘down-trodden, degenerated and treated as hewers of wood and drawers of water’. Like all Arya Samajists, he blamed this on the neglect of Vedic scriptures which had resulted in ‘ignorance, superstition and blind faith’. He urged the Maha Sabha to see to it that religious texts, especially the Ramayana, Upanishads, Mahabharata, and Bhagavad Gita, were introduced to all Hindu temples and that pandits are brought from India to ‘stamp the imprints of Hindu culture and the sublimity of Vedas in the hearts of Indian youths of this country’.

His influence on local Hindu leaders was significant, as many projects that the Maha Sabha undertook during the 1940s when it was revived again were suggested by Pandit Jaimini in this address. These included the establishment of a journal controlled by the Maha Sabha (the Hindu) and the erection of a hall to act as its headquarters (the Swami Shankaranand Hall).

The messages of these two missionaries are important as they addressed a number of issues which were of concern to Hindu leaders in the country. Over the years Hindu leaders have expressed fear over the possibility of South African Hindus converting and ‘abandoning’ their ‘culture’. They argued that reasons for conversion lie in the diversity of Hindu philosophy which led to confusion amongst the youth, a lack of pride in their Hindu heritage, poverty which made them more receptive to Christian missionaries in the country, and a lack of textual Hinduism which resulted in an ignorance of Hindu

44. GLDC, South African Hindu Maha Sabha collection (Hereafter SAHMS), Minutes of 1934 SAHMS Hindu Conference, 27 May 1934.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid.
philosophy. Studying minutes of local Hindu organisations and the pamphlets that Hindus leaders distributed during the first half of the century indicates that they believed that the prevalence in South Africa of ritual-orientated Hinduism portrayed Hinduism in a negative light resulting in ignorance and ultimately conversion. The teachings of these missionaries were seen as a powerful step in combating the ‘problem’ of conversion. While the reformist teachings of the missionaries contradicted with many of the traditions of South African Hindus, the missionaries educated in famous institutions in India were nonetheless very popular and seen as authoritative figures. The two missionaries who were eloquent speakers and experienced preachers were able to communicate the reformist message more effectively than local reformist minded Hindu leaders.

**Pandit Mehta Jaimini**

Pandit Mehta Jaimini was born in Punjab in 1861. He was educated in Multan where he graduated in 1896 with an LLB degree. He worked in the legal profession for the next 20 years. During this time he became an adherent of the Arya Samaj and started working with various movements that sought to promote the education of women. In 1922 he joined the Hindu College at Bindravan where he decided to dedicate his life to teaching Hinduism. The following year he travelled to Burma where he conducted 182 lectures. His next tour was to Mauritius to preach for the Arya Samaj movements there. His stay in Mauritius coincided with the 1925 birth centenary celebrations of Dayananda, in which he took a leadership role. According to P. Ramsurrun, his lectures during this time had a huge effect on the youth and resulted in the formation of the Arya Kumar Sabha, a youth wing for Mauritius’s major Arya Samaj body, the Arya Paropkarini Sabha. Ramsurrun adds that his visit marked an increase in militancy of the Arya Samaj movement in Mauritius. Arya Samajists began organising debates to defend Vedic culture against Sanathan Pandits, Christian priests and Muslim mullahs. They also introduced suddhi movements (reconversion) for both Christian and Muslim converts with over a hundred ‘reconversions’ in the next 20 years.

The following year Jaimini left Mauritius to continue his missionary work in the Pacific Islands where he visited Siam, Singapore, Malaya, Java and Sumatra. He ended the tour by

49. These reasons have been put forward by Hindu leaders in the country throughout the twentieth century. However, the reasons for conversion in South African are far more complex. In spite of the concern by Hindu leaders during the interwar period, it was only after the passing of the Group Areas Act in 1950 when large numbers of Hindus began converting to Christianity. See G. Pillay, Religion at the Limits? Pentecostalism among Indian South Africa (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1994).

50. These sentiments appear in Maha Sabha and APS council meetings. In 1946 the Maha Sabha began publishing a journal called the *Hindu* which it distributed to affiliated organisations and temples. In one article titled ‘Divine Healing and Conversions’, local Hindu leader N.P. Desai argued that that ‘misguided Christian missionaries, in order to gain their ends, have been sent all over Natal to convert large masses of ignorant, illiterate and economically downtrodden Hindus to Christianity’. In a different untitled article but in the same edition of the *Hindu*, Desai argued that if Hindus studied their own texts they would realised that there is no need for conversion. See *Hindu*, May 1946. For a lengthy discussion about the relation between poverty, ignorance and conversion see South African Hindu Maha Sabha (Hereafter SAHMS), Biennial General Report, June 1945 to March 1947. Made available by SAHMS secretary in 2009.

51. ‘Philosophy of the East, Dr Mehta Jaimini to Lecture in City’, *Natal Witness*, 30 April 1933.

52. P. Ramsurrun, Arya Samaj in a Nutshell (Delhi: Aryan Heritage, 1984), 32.

visiting Fiji and New Zealand. In 1929 he ventured to the Americas to lecture in Northern and Central America before visiting Trinidad and nearby islands. In Trinidad, Steven Vertovec argues that Jaimini’s lectures on the greatness of Indian civilisation, importance of the Vedas and education, equality of women and the futility of idol worship, had a huge impact. Even those who were not supporters of the Arya Samaj, Vertovec argues, were motivated to take pride in the heritage of India. Arya Samaj missionaries who arrived before him had little influence but Jaimini and Pandit Ayodhia Prasad who would pick up from where he left off ‘were renowned for their sophistication and scholarship’ and were very influential and popular. In Trinidad, Jaimini embarrassed Brahman priests and other leaders of Sanathan organisations in public debates. He followed his tour of the Americas by visiting China, Japan and Europe and lectured throughout these states. The strong theme that permeated his lectures was promoting the ‘glory’ of ancient India and its traditions, a theme that would continue on his tour to South Africa.

In 1931 when he visited East Africa he appealed to the APS of South Africa to invite him. However, owing to financial difficulties faced by the APS at the time they were unable to and he returned to India. It was during the APS’s Hindu conference of 1933 which dealt with the topic of reviving the Maha Sabha that M.C. Varman volunteered to bring Mehta Jaimini to arouse the enthusiasm amongst Hindus necessary to revive the dormant umbrella body. Jaimini arrived in April 1933 and conducted 47 lectures during his first 49 days spent in the country. He dealt with various themes promoting the ancient teachings of the Vedas from an Arya Samaj perspective and stressed equality for women and the importance of educating girls. His first set of lectures was conducted in Pietermaritzburg and admission to attend was free of charge. The first lecture on ‘Indian Culture’ took place on 31 April 1933 and was presided over by the superintendent for education at the time F.D. Hugo.

In a lecture delivered at the City Hall in Pietermaritzburg to a large number of Indians and ‘fair sprinkling of Europeans and natives’, the swami stressed the importance of five duties – namely, prayers and reading of the Vedas every morning, cleanliness in the home, the support of education and scholars who propagate religion, service for the less fortunate, and the protection of domesticated animals. He also talked about the Vedas which he called ‘the foundation of all religions, languages, science and culture’ and accused the European translators of the Vedas of incorrectly translating them resulting in various misconceptions which he said are constantly being corrected to reveal India as the cradle of the human race. From an Arya Samaj perspective he argued that the ‘study of the Vedas would dispel the error that they represented the worship of idols, trees, stones and so forth’ and that ‘there was only one God, omnipotent, omniscient, infinite and eternal’. This was in contrast to many of the traditions of local Hindus. He ended the lecture by speaking

54. ‘Philosophy of the East, Dr Mehta Jaimini to Lecture in City’, Natal Witness, 30 April 1933.
56. Ibid.
57. ‘Philosophy of the East, Dr Mehta Jaimini to Lecture in City’, Natal Witness, 30 April 1933.
58. Vedralankar, Religious Awakening, 55.
59. Indian Opinion, 1 June 1934.
60. ‘Dr Jaimini’s Lecture on the Vedas’, Natal Witness, 30 April 1934.
61. Ibid.
62. Ibid.
63. Ibid.
about his experiences in the United States which he accused of contradicting the ideals of universal brotherhood. He exclaimed his frustration that Asians were barred from gaining American citizenship and said that if Jesus Christ (born in Jerusalem) had to visit the US he would have had to arrive with at least £100 and would still be ‘told to push off’ after his turn was finished. His last remarks were criticisms of the US’s ‘millionaires like Henry Ford.’

On 5 May 1934 the swami gave a lecture at the HYMA hall (Pietermaritzburg) to women only on the ‘Ideals of Womanhood’ and followed with a lecture on ‘Cremation verses Burial’ where he quoted from the Yajur Veda to stress an important aspect of various traditions of Hinduism, cremation. He added that for economic reasons alone it was rational to cremate and not bury and cited data from prominent medical researchers in England.

On 10 May he represented India in a meeting of the Natal Debating Society held in Pietermaritzburg and argued for ‘good will’ between India and South Africa. Two days later, lecturing in Pietermaritzburg, he defended reincarnation on various grounds and argued that its truth was indicated in several verses in the Bible. He thereafter criticised the two different reasons put forward by Christian leaders and scientists to explain physical and mental deformities present at birth. He accused Christian explanations of using the idea of an unjust God and scientific explanations of heredity of being unsupported. He claimed the answers always lay in the Vedas. The idea of reincarnation and paying for past sins was his explanation and he made the potential controversial claim that physical deformities at birth were the result of sins committed in past lives.

On 23 May Jaimini gave a lecture on Indian culture at the inaugural meeting of the Indian Study Circle, a body recently established to promote the study of ancient Indian culture. This he followed with a lecture organised by the Overport Indian Study Group and Debating Society on the Mahabharta at the Shree Ramayan Sabha schoolroom which was packed to its capacity. The Maha Sabha organised three of his lectures at the Parsee Rustomjee Hall titled ‘Eastern View of civilisation’, ‘Reincarnation a myth’ and ‘Cult of the coming man’ which he gave on 18, 20 and 22 June respectively.

On 17 December, the Sea View Hindu Association and district Hindu women’s association organised a meeting to pay tribute to the work conducted by the pandit. At a lecture on Indian culture in Pietermaritzburg he accused ‘oriental scholars and certain missionaries’ of showing only the darker side of India to designate superiority for themselves. He thereafter quoted Kurt Baron von Schroeder, a German businessman known for his right-wing political views and financial support to the Nazi Party of Germany during the 1930s. He quoted from von Schroeder’s assertion that the ancient Aryans possessed the purest, simplest and best civilisation which was the mother of world culture. Jaimini thereafter made a comment common to many Hindu reformers that while

64. Ibid.
68. Indian Opinion, 18 June 1934.
70. See J. Hoefle, ‘The British Empire’s Fascism Stalks America’, Executive Intelligence Review (2009), 12–18.
the Western world advanced scientifically and materially it still lagged behind India in spiritual contentment and added that if the world followed Indian culture then ‘peace and tranquillity would prevail’. He made more comments about Indian culture prohibiting the destruction of life which he argued was necessary to prevent the new methods of warfare conducted in the West, before criticising the League of Nations, which he claimed would be unable to bring peace when nations continued to exploit and extend territories.

Jaimini also used the medium of newspapers to communicate the teachings of the Vedas to the public. He responded to an article in the Natal Witness called ‘the Future of a Great Religion’ to address the ‘misunderstandings’ concerning Hinduism he felt were present in the article. In a very long and detailed article he challenged the notion that Hinduism had no book or central teaching but was based on a complex social organisation, which he called the author’s ‘unfamiliarity’ with Hindu culture. He stressed the centrality of the Vedas to Hindu religion and made reference to Max Muller and Jaccoliet. He said that Hindu religion was not a creed but a realisation that was ‘pliable but firm’. An interesting aspect was his support for the legitimacy of the Varna divisions as stated in the Vedas, but he condemned the notion that this justified a caste system based on heredity. He claimed that they were based on merit through ‘meritorious services’. The curiosity and enthusiasm shown by many toward the pandit’s teachings was of crucial importance to local reformers and the task of promoting a Hindu consciousness.

Swami Adhyānanda

Jaimini’s stay in the country coincided with that of Swami Adhyānanda, who was the first representative of the Ramakrishna Mission to arrive in the country. The Ramakrishna Mission was a Neo-Hindu reform movement founded in 1897 by Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902), the chief disciple of the Indian mystic Sri Ramakrishna (1834–1886). By 1933 there were already over 120 Ramakrishna missions throughout India and it was to the branch in Calcutta that THSS sent an appeal for a missionary. The mission replied by sending Swami Adhyānanda, a Sanskrit scholar of Calcutta University who was 40 years old and had served the mission for 16 years. When asked about why he joined the mission the swami claimed that Bengal in the days he joined was seething in nationalism, and being philosophically minded and in close contact with followers of Vivekananda the ‘spirit of service awoke within him’. He also served as editor to a paper published by the mission and was the founder of the Singapore Ramakrishna Mission.

He arrived in the Transvaal at the beginning of 1934 and preached there for three months before he was brought to Natal under the invitation of the Maha Sabha. The swami’s views were characterised by a lecture presented in Johannesburg where he claimed that ‘if there is one thing that India could teach the world it is her philosophy’. He talked

71. Natal Witness, 4 May 1934.
72. Ibid.
73. Natal Witness, 7 June 1934.
76. Ibid.
about all the economic, political and social problems in the world, claiming that India’s philosophy was not only the solution, but would ‘make for mutual respect between different creeds and nations’. He said that ‘India in spite of her ills today, sent out that idea of religious synthesis in thought and showed the warring world how real peace based on spiritual idealism might be obtained’.78

When asked about his experiences in South Africa in an interview conducted by the Indian Opinion, the swami answered that education needed to be improved and that in spite of the ‘harsh laws much constructive work could be done’ by Indians with regard to improving sanitation and hygiene, but he added ‘that from what I have seen I am inclined to think there are not many persons here who are willing to undertake such constructive work’. When asked what dissatisfied him about the Indian community in South Africa he answered that ‘provincialism and sectarianism seem to be very common in this community’. He added that Gandhi left behind ideals which should act as inspiration for this community.79 This interview was conducted before his arrival in Natal but after months of lecturing throughout the Transvaal. During this time he had raised money for the THSS to purchase books on Indian philosophy and culture from a series of lectures he conducted at the University of the Witwatersrand. He was invited by the women’s branch of the South African Party to deliver a lecture on ‘Indian Womanhood’ but was warned by the secretary of the Indian Women’s Association of Transvaal that being Indian he would not be permitted to. He wrote to the Women’s Branch of the SAP and was permitted, but when he attended his Indian friends were refused entry so he refused to lecture.80

On 21 May 1934 Swami Adhyananda was given a reception at the Royal Picture Palace in Durban, organised by newly elected representatives of the Maha Sabha. Also present were Bhawani Dayal and Mehta Jaimini. Jaimini received a huge applause upon his arrival at the packed hall, another indication of his popularity in the country. B.M. Patel gave a speech to welcome the swami and thereafter garlanded him. A few others spoke including Dayal.81

Speaking in Pietermaritzburg the swami continued with his theme of the universality of Hindu thought claiming that

Hinduism is a universal religion. It does not limit its teachings to any one personality or to any one book, but on its revelations. It does not impose a limit on the limitless, nor dogmatise on the infinite.

However, he was careful in highlighting that Hinduism was a coherent religion and not merely a collection of diverging thoughts, by adding that in spite of all the apparent divisions there is a fundamental unity which is the goal of achieving ‘the realisation of the Supreme Reality’.82 The swami’s speech was characterised by the strong reformist idea of showing Hinduism as a universal religion while maintaining monotheism. Like Jaimini he

82. Undated article taken from the Natal Witness: see GLDC, Press Cuttings, R.B. Maharaj Collection of Press Cuttings.
claimed reincarnation was the ‘only rational explanation’ for inequality at birth. A typical reformer, he argued that religion was not based on ceremonies but on individuals getting ‘inside themselves to see the truth’ and added that his experience in this country showed ‘that people who go under the name of Hindus do not know anything of their faith’. He urged such people to study the Bhagavad Gita which he called the ‘nut shell’ of Hindu thought. The swami ended the lecture by urging local Hindus to establish schools to teach religion and never to forget their cultural heritage.

Local responses to the two missionaries

Like Jaimini, Adhyananda also used the newspapers to reach out to the public in his attempts to propagate the reformist Hindu message. An article that appeared in the Natal Witness titled ‘What is Hinduism’ by an individual under the name ‘Student’ went to lengths to complement work of Swami Adhyananda. ‘Student’, however, ended the article by claiming that the swami had also bewildered his audience with regard to some of his theories, and he issued two sets of questions directed at the swami. The first was whether Hinduism teaches polytheism or monotheism and whether it teaches idol worship or animism. The second question was how Hinduism could teach one or the other when there are so many different forms of worship that are accepted in different parts of India. ‘Student’ concluded by asking ‘what then is the ultimate teaching of the Vedas?’84 His questions were not surprising given the lengths to which the swami had gone to refute all who claimed that Hinduism was a collection of thoughts and practices, insisting that it had an essential character. Swami Adhyananda responded to the article at length, by emphasising that Hinduism teaches whatever is needed to achieve the ‘ultimate truth’.85

The work conducted by these two missionaries brought about strong feelings amongst some local Hindus. During this time, ten years before the Maha Sabha first addressed it at the fourth Hindu conference, the issue of Hindu religious instruction at schools was proposed by some individuals in the public. One commentator said that words of the missionaries needed to be taken into consideration and the issue of Christian instruction being given to Hindu children began to become a major concern.86

On 16 August 1934, Swami Adhyananda left Durban for Port Elizabeth where he stayed until 11 September. He conducted four lectures at the City Hall, each presided over by the mayor and his deputy. They were titled ‘Searchlight of the soul’; ‘Is Reincarnation a myth?’; ‘Cult of the future’ and ‘How to awake the Spiritual Consciousness’. He was also the guest of the Rotary Club where he lectured on ‘Modern India’ and gave two talks to members of the Theosophical Society on the Bhagavad Gita. On 14 September he went to Grahamstown where he was given a welcome reception by the British Indian Association.

84. ‘What is Hinduism’, Natal Witness, 8 June 1934.
On 18 September he gave a lecture on ‘What India can teach the World’ at the City Hall which was presided over by Mayor W. Mills.87

The swami was also popular with the Indian Opinion editorial and was asked to write on the relation between science and religion. In response, he wrote an article where he made a case that Hinduism is more continuous than Christianity with modern science by suggesting that the universe is more like a mind and less like a machine. On 2 November and 2 December he was asked to write about Diwali. Both articles are very long and while not necessary to repeat here at length, the main themes are important as they reflect his neo-Hindu views. Rather than explain the literal meaning of the battle in the Ramayana on which the celebration of Diwali is based, he began by claiming that all religions attempt to explain the higher truths of God through ‘allegories, parables and elements of mythology’. In the Puranas, he claimed, the devas (Gods) and asuras (demons) are merely metaphors. The asuras, or evil, represent ignorance while to conquer the ignorance one needs to worship God as a mother which he called ‘peculiar to Hinduism’. Man, he says, has two forms, the physical and material and only through meditation and worshiping God as the mother can one achieve superconscious thought needed to differentiate right from wrong.88 The mistake Hindus make, he argued, was to celebrate Diwali only as a celebration like Christmas and to forget its true significance. In concluding the article he gave this message to the readers: ‘only by living more in moral and spiritual ways’ can Hindus ‘celebrate Diwali correctly’. This he said was necessary to enhance the cause of the Indian in this country and pay real homage to the founder of the Indian Opinion (Gandhi) who by his doctrine of non-violence (Ahisma) and satyagraha (truth force) and soul force (atmaskakti) had only re-interpreted the age long belief and philosophy of Hinduism.89

On 26 December the THSS gave Swami Adhyananda a farewell reception presided over by Kumar Maharaj Singh at the Patidar Hall in Johannesburg. On behalf of the THSS, Singh presented the swami with a gold watch and a donation of £50 for the Ramakrishna Mission. At the reception the swami urged South African Indians to be more ‘manly’ and depend ‘more on self-help than on what the government would give’ them.90 He once again stressed the importance of education and reminded the audience of their ‘great and ancient culture and civilisation’. In his final message to South African Indians he claimed that South Africa is a comparatively young country and as is usual with all comparatively young countries the people are superficial in their thoughts. They do not want to go deep into things. But where is the possibility of real harmony, piece and joy for men without the truths of the spirit? My message to South Africa is that it can learn a good deal from an old country like India. But then the Indians in this country cut off as they are with traditions and the glories of the Motherland have themselves first to assimilate their own culture and glorious heritage.

Learn your own culture, try to assimilate, not imitate the best which the Western civilisation can give you. When this has been done and the Indians by their honesty, integrity and cleanliness both external and internal have proved their worth then they will no longer be considered a menace to this country but will be welcomed as partners.91

87. ‘Hindu Women’s Interests’, Indian Opinion, 28 September 1934.
88. Indian Opinion, 2 November 1934.
89. Indian Opinion, 2 December 1934.
91. Ibid.
The swami’s message to South African Hindus about assimilating Western culture with their ‘own culture’ is interesting but ambiguous. It is ambiguous what the swami meant by the ‘culture’ of South African Hindus. His Neo-Hindu philosophy, like that of the Arya Samaj is a particular interpretation of Hinduism and indentured Indians arrived in South African bringing a vast myriad of diverging traditions with them.\(^{92}\) The ceremonies and practices of South African Hindus drew from a vast array of traditions, customs and fables in contrast to the reflective form of Hinduism put forward by Swami Adhyananda and Arya Samaj missionaries like Pandit Jaimini. The two missionaries preached a monotheistic interpretation of Hinduism that was different to that practised by South African Hindus who were very heterogeneous, and they sought to abolish traditions that may have been regarded by many South Africans as fundamental to their religious heritage. The ideas put forward by these two missionaries were seen by Hindu leaders as being a powerful method of restoring pride in Hinduism; however, the practices of most Hindus conducted at homes and in temples in the country during this time shows that the reformist tendency of the missionaries had little impact on the vast majority of South African Hindus.\(^{93}\) There was another group of Hindu reformers who visited the country in 1934. While they were not brought to Natal by Maha Sabha to participate in their revival conference, their visit coincided with that of the other two missionaries and their visit helps to depict the enthusiasm that was shown by many local Hindus.

### The girl guides from Baroda

On 18 July 1934 Pandit Anandpriya the principle of the Arya Kanya Mahavidyalaya of Baroda arrived in the country along with his wife and 22 of his students known collectively as the Baroda Girl Guides. Established in 1925, the Arya Kanya Mahavidyalaya admitted only unmarried girls who were expected to complete 13 years of study with their parents’ consent not to withdraw the girls prior to their 16th birthday. While the institution was Hindu and placed emphasis on Arya Samaj principles, its doors were open to girls of all faiths and a small number of Muslim girls were admitted, one of whom was present on the tour to South Africa.\(^{94}\)

Their visit to South Africa was part of a world tour with two purposes. The first was to learn about the countries they visited and the second was to challenge common stereotypes of womanhood in India thus promoting gender equality and female education amongst Indians abroad.\(^{95}\) Before arriving in the country they had toured Kenya and Uganda for two months where their demonstrations and lectures proved popular amongst Indians and Europeans.\(^{96}\) Upon arrival they were accorded a public reception at the Victoria Picture

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93. For an ethnographic study of Hindus conducted in the later 1950s see Kuper, *Indian People*, 186–261. For a study dealing with Hindu temples in South Africa which contain some historical information on practices conducted in these temples see P. Mikula, B. Kearney and R. Harber, *Traditional Hindu Temples in South Africa* (Durban: Hindu Temple Publications, 1982).
95. Ibid.
96. *Indian Opinion*, 18 May 1934.
Palace in Durban which was packed to its limits. The reception was organised by the APS whose president, R.K. Kapitan, organised their lectures across South Africa and Rhodesia and provided their accommodation and living expenses. The girl guides promoted gender equality and Vedic culture through demonstrations of gymnastics, archery and displays using daggers, swords and sticks never seen before in the country. A journalist of the Natal Advertiser who attended the reception claimed that the large audience ‘including hundreds of women, received two shocks yesterday which completely upset their conservative ideas’. The first was the dress of the girl guides consisting of ‘knickerbockers and belts, from which large clasp knives dangled’ and the second was their ‘forceful addresses, showing a masterly command of language in Hindi and English, and vigorously expressed independent views’. According to the reporter their two hour address was received with great enthusiasm from both male and females in the audience which ‘almost amounted to frenzy’.

The girl guides were extremely popular, as illustrated by one concert and display of gymnastics that they performed on 25 July when between ‘4000 and 5000 enthusiastic Indians’ packed the Town Hall of Durban but 300 more had to be turned away. This concert was equally matched by another performance at the Town Hall which took place on 6 August attracting over 3,000 spectators. On 28 July the Maha Sabha accorded them a reception at the Gandhi Library in Durban. Many ‘prominent’ members of the community were present amongst them were the two other international Hindu missionaries Pandit Jamini and Swami Adyananda.

On 13 August in Johannesburg a group of three girl guides aged 13, 14 and 15 brought ‘an audience of nearly 3000 to outbursts of wild enthusiasm’ with their performance. Thereafter they ‘scorned’ the book Mother India written by an American author Catherine Mayo who criticised Indian culture and condemned the inferior status of Indian women. The girls asked sarcastically ‘are we the down trodden women of which she [Mayo] wrote?’ Standing before the crowd wearing ‘jackets and knickerbockers with daggers slung at their side’ they exclaimed that they are the example of young Indian women ‘the alleged victims of child marriage, to give the lie direct to Mother India’. These words received a large roar of approval from the crowd.

At a gymnastic display they conducted in Ladysmith on 15 October the Major O. B. Jones who presided was garlanded by one of the guides who stood 12 yards away and fired an arrow breaking the string of the garland suspended above his head. The following night at the city hall the girls performed another display of gymnastics which also included Indian club swinging, yoga, Garba dances, dagger and spear drills as well as dagger, sword, stick and shield fights. On 22 October Pandit Anandpriya gave a speech at the Ladysmith Town Hall where he expressed pleasure in the way that he and the girl guides were received. He said that the South African Hindus showed that their beliefs were ‘allied to that of the Unitarian, a great wise God who made everything and was

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97. Natal Advertiser, 18 July 1934
100. Indian Opinion, 3 August 1934.
103. Natal Advertiser, 18 October 1934.
ready to help at time of need’ and ‘who requires no intercessor between’. This ‘intercessor’ a clear reference to many sanathanist traditions. He added that on his tour he saw no evidence of caste, child marriages or any worshiping of idols and therefore had only ‘pleasant memories to take back’. 104

On 25 October 1934 the girl guides performed at the largest hall in Pietermaritzburg for Indians, the HYMA Hall, and attracted the largest crowd that the hall has ever seen with a large overflow of people outside. The leader of the guides, Subhadra Kumari, gave a speech in which she argued that the purpose of the girl guides was to show the world that ‘Indian womanhood was not a whit behind the women of any other country’ in spite of the ‘detractors like Catherine Mayo’. Kumari added that Indian women were playing their role in the betterment of their country and concluded by requesting Indian woman in South Africa to never forget their ‘mother tongue and race’ and to ‘do all you can to uplift your community and country’. 105 She was supported by two other girl guides who addressed the crowd by highlighting the important role played by Indian women who ‘are not behind any other girl’. 106 They were followed by Anandpriya who stressed the importance of physical culture in the light of the nation ‘as was seen in Germany and Italy to-day’. He warned that physical culture was being neglected by Indians, which he said was a concern because it ‘made for a better race’. He worried that South African Indians were ‘losing their nationality especially in the Cape’ and argued that both men and women need to develop a ‘militaristic attitude’ when it came to physical development. He once again stressed the importance of providing girls with the best education and claimed that ‘if one girl is educated the family is educated, and if the family is educated the nation is educated’. His long speech was concluded with his assertion that the girl guides came with a ‘definite purpose’ which was to assist the Indian community of South Africa to become educationally and physically stronger than they were currently and warned against internal divisions which weakened the community. 107

When the girl guides performed their displays of archery and various other forms of weapon handling and combat at the Pietermaritzburg City Hall, Subhadra Kumari once again made the point that the girl guides aimed to challenge all those who attempted to belittle the status of womanhood in India. 108

The girl guides were also invited to perform twice at the Durban European Girl’s High School and received phrase from the Headmistress for their performance. 109 At the end the girl guides were able to raise over £5,000 which they took back to India to sponsor their school. They sailed back for India on 5 November 1934 with a farewell accorded to them by the Surat Hindu Association. 110

104. Indian Opinion, 26 October 1934
106. Ibid.
107. Ibid.
110. Indian Opinion, 16 November 2010.
Conclusion

The focus of this paper has been Pandit Mehta Jaimini, Swami Adhyananda and Pandit Anandpriya, and the Baroda Girl Guides. The influence of these three missionaries and students in the country created an atmosphere and enthusiasm amongst Hindus, unparalleled during the preceding years. The missionaries called on South Africans to promote certain festivals, study particular ancient texts, educate girls, take pride in an Indian heritage and abandon many of the traditions that reformers condemned like idolatry. Clarifications about how Hinduism could be a universal religion yet still propose a clear teaching was very important to Hindu leaders who feared that a misunderstanding of Hindu philosophy could result in South African Hindus converting. Also interesting is the way in which the missionaries saw South Africa Hindus, as they saw Hindus elsewhere, as the ‘motherland’ of the future of Hinduism. Studying the speeches of many Hindu missionaries over the years indicates that they saw themselves as travelling across a translational network of Hindu communities and the term ‘Greater India’ was evoked by one to refer to the way in which missionaries saw the regions where Indians settled as united by a common culture and religious heritage. The prevalence of ritual-orientated Hinduism and presence of missionaries of other faiths was seen as a threat to that heritage. In reality however, there were vast differences in religious practices amongst Hindus in India and abroad, and South African Hindus reflected this diversity. Practices that the Arya Samaj and other reformist movements sought to abolish were a part of the religious heritage of many South African Hindus. While large numbers turned out to attend the lectures, the reformist teachings of the missionaries had little impact on the practices of Hindus who continued and continue today to partake in populists practices.

A study of the Maha Sabha has shown that missionaries were a crucial in the drive to unite Hindus. The departure of these three missionaries by the end of 1934 meant that the interest and enthusiasm shown during their stay had died down. Shortly thereafter, the Maha Sabha fell into dormancy again and it was only with the visits of Pandit Rishiram beginning in 1937 that its leaders were brought together to organise his lectures and slowly brought the Maha Sabha back to life. When the Maha Sabha was brought back to life, its leaders struggled to get going and took many years to pursue many of its aims. It was hardly the virile organisation that Pandit Mehta Jaimini stressed for in his address in the 1934 conference. The linguistic heterogeneity of South African Hindus, who also belong to many different sects, increased the difficulty of unifying Hindus under one body. Crucial in South Africa was that the ratio of North and South Indians, and that religious practices amongst Hindus were too diverse. Organisations that promoted parochial Hindu identities

111. Bhawani Dayal makes reference to this term in many of his speeches when referring to the regions Indians settled in. He was also editor to a newspaper distributed throughout these regions where Indians settled. For a study dealing with his use of the term in his newspaper see H. Hofmeyr, P. Kaarsholm and L. Subramanian, ‘Introduction: Print Cultures, Nationalisms and Publics of the Indian Ocean’ (Paper presented at the Print Cultures, Nationalisms and Publics of the Indian Ocean conference, Johannesburg, January 2009).

112. Gopalan, ‘Caste, Class and Community’.

113. These are the sentiments of Maha Sabha secretary S.R. Pather in SAHMS, Council Meeting, 17 May 1939. Made available by the SAHMS secretary in 2009.
had long lasting influence and most Hindus partook in their religious activities at home and at temples independently of the Maha Sabha.

In some of the other colonies, the arrival of Ayra Samaj missionaries led to the formation of reform-orientated Hindu bodies which were also militant anti-colonial political organisations that clashed with Muslim bodies and other Hindu organisations. Hindu leaders in South Africa who invited and hosted the Hindu missionaries were also leaders of secular political bodies and fostering unity amongst Indians was emphasised by them. While their impact in South Africa was notably different, the influence of missionaries on local Hindu leaders should not be neglected, and they were a crucial factor behind most endeavours to promote a Hindu consciousness in South Africa. Many other Hindu missionaries arrived in South Africa throughout the twentieth century with slightly different aims and philosophies meriting further research into their influence on local Hindus why South Africans interpreted their messages in different ways to Hindus elsewhere.