

Hinduism in South Africa: Caste, Ethnicity, and Invented Traditions, 1860-Present

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ABSTRACT This paper examines the experience of Hindus and Hinduism in South Africa over the past century and half. It shows that while the influence of caste has generally greatly diminished, Hinduism continues to flourish, and even shows signs of prosperity in public spaces. If the reification of Hinduism is taking place, the faith is also opening itself up to other transgressive possibilities. Hinduism has not been static but continues to undergo transformations of all kinds, in part due to influences from the Indian sub-continent, and one of the burdens of this paper is to suggest that no Hinduism should be regarded as “authentic”. South African Hinduism displays its own characteristic features and should be examined on its own terms, in the very specific social, cultural, political, and economic conditions in which it is forged. Understanding how Hinduism is conceptualized and formulated in different settings will allow us to compare distant diasporic communities with each other, as well as with the “homeland”, and also understand how these communities view each other.