

Resistance and Change: Strategies of Neo-Hindu Movements in South Africa

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ABSTRACT Virtually all neo-Hindu movements in South Africa began their work with an ideal to transform Hinduism from what they termed as superstitious beliefs and archaic ritual practices. What they were really responding to was the fear of losing Hindus to either Christianity or Islam. Their diagnosis was that the Hindus that came from the lower strata of society to South Africa from 1860 as indentured labourers were steeped in ritual practices that were grounded in superstitious beliefs and that they lacked a rational philosophical and intellectual understanding of Hinduism. This led to their attempts to introduce an intellectual and rational approach to Hinduism which they believed would provide a strong foundation to withstand the attraction of converting to other religions in the face of a strong critique that Hinduism was based on idolatry and polytheism. In the end, the strategies attempted by the neo-Hindu movements neither prevented at least some Hindus from joining other religions, nor did they abolish the so-called archaic ritual practices that South African Hindus to date continue to practice. In this article, the researcher examines the strategies of two important neo-Hindu movements, the Arya Samaj and the Saiva Sithantha Sangam, to assess their impact on Hindus in South Africa in offering alternatives to resist the temptations to become converts to other religions.