

“Hinduism in South Africa”

Swami Amarnathananda

In our childhood days, I have read a book call ‘Tarzan’. I am not sure, it was a series of books or just one book. In that book we read, Tarzan was born of an European family, but nourished by a mother gorilla. He grew up with other young animal, learned their language, develop the skills to fight with cruel animal for his survival and later he became the king of jungle. Being we were young and our imaginations could go far beyond, we developed an idea of Africa that is full of jungle and the place is crowed with lions, gorillas, tigers, crocodiles, poisonous snakes and many kinds of other animals.

Life changed, I joined the monastic mission ‘Bharat Sevashram Sangha’. In ashram I read a book call ‘ Pracharbrate Viswamay’ written by Pujjya Swami Advaitanandaji Maharaj, the past general secretary of the Bharat Sevashram sangha. In that book Swamiji gave an elaborate description of his worldwide tour as a Sangha missionary. Under his leadership, a group of monks went to Eastern part of Africa, specially Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda etc. countries. They remained there continuously for two long years and covered a large part of Africa, preaching. This book gave us a different picture of Africa. An Africa where a lot of Indian people working at various fields, the presence of European, natural beauty of Africa, minerals and above of all, a picture of the life of African people.

History began to write new pages. India got independence. It now become three countries – India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. After the second world war, when Europe was trying to rebuild their broken fate,

intellectual young generation throughout the world looked at America as their prime destination. While the rest of the world keep progressing in all fields, Africa, the wonder of this world is forgotten, neglected, manipulated and used. African people are left behind to face the brutal. Their diamonds are exported all over the world, their animals made the Zoological gardens rich everywhere, costly wood from their forest made beautiful furniture and beautified the home of others, their land went at the hands of destiny and their culture is being robbed. In today's world, most of the African people are converted to other faiths of which, they are not so familiar. Even at this twenty first century, people still know of Africa, a place full of jungle with wild animals and a place unsafe to live. Yes, it is true that Africa has jungle, Africa has wild animals, it is true too that the crime rate is high in Africa, but that is not all. What Africa has, many nations are not so fortunate to have that.

Indian people migrated to Africa hundreds of years ago. With them, Hinduism also spread almost every corner of this continent in various forms. But in this essay, we will mainly focus South Africa. Whenever we talk of South Africa, as Indian, the first names come to our mind are Dr. Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi. Dr. Nelson Mandela become a face of freedom struggle. He has become a role model to all who dream freedom. On the other hand, the philosophy of 'non-violence' of Mahatma Gandhi become a principle guideline to all freedom fighters of this world. He started this movement while he was in South Africa, practicing law.

Hinduism is found in various provinces of South Africa, but mainly in KwaZulu-Natal. Approximately 1.22% or 551,669 of the South African population professed to be Hindu, according to the 2001 census. This is the largest concentration of Hindus in Africa after Mauritius. Vast majority of the current Hindus in South Africa are the descendants of indentured laborers brought by the British colonial Government from 1860 to 1919 to work in the plantations and mining operations owned by

the European settlers. Many of them came from Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and some other parts of India. The first Hindu temple in South Africa were in operation in the year of 1869.

In 2014, I got the privilege to travel to South Africa, Kenya and Uganda for a preaching mission. In my first mission, I spent almost seventeen days in South Africa, travelling from Johannesburg, Pretoria to all the way to Richards Bay, preaching. Though I have been visiting South Africa regularly since then and I am in a mission to open a chapter of 'Bharat Sevashram Sangha' at the city of Durban, but my first mission was completely a different one.

With Mr. Pravesh G. Hurdeen, the current 'World Hindu Foundation' president with me, we started our journey from Johannesburg. Gradually, we travel to Pretoria, Lenasia, Benoni, Nofta, New Castle, Ladysmith, Escourt, Pietermaritzburg, Durban, Phoenix, Richards Bay, Tongaat, Stanger and many other places. Driving through the picturesque roads and landscape of South Africa, we spoke at many temples and public gatherings and met the revered Swamijis of the Ramakrishna Mission, Chinmaya Mission, Life divine Society and International society for Krishna Consciousness. We also met officials of the 'South African Hindu Maha Sabha' at Durban and spoke at the Hindvani Radio station. We also had opportunity to meet many important Hindu personalities who are working for the Hindu causes in the country. This long seventeen days tour by road gave me a very clear idea of the South African Nation and the Presence of the Hindu society in the country. At Present, Hindus are scattered all over the country, though young generations are more attracted to move to Johannesburg, the financial capital of the nation. Hindu community has built many beautiful temples wherever they are. Navaratri, Diwali, Maha-Shivaratri, Holi and other Hindu festivals are celebrated in a grand way. Many times, I felt Hindus in South Africa are more Hindus than the Indian people who are directly coming to the country to change their fortune.

A caution. Today almost no Indian people work at the sugar plantation. Apartheid days are over and the country is free from all from of racial discrimination. Average Hindus in South Africa are doing very good. They are successful in Business and in all kinds of professional fields. There are many Indian doctor, professors, architects, engineers, lawyers and teachers can be seen in everywhere in the country. Beyond of few countries, Africa is mostly known for black people. They are the son of the soil. Europeans, Indian, Chinese all went there to change their fortune. As these communities are prospering in every field, African people are still remained under the poverty level. It would be wonderful if rich community come forward and extend their helping hands to uplift the local people. We all know that poverty, lack of education, lack of food, clothes and medical facilities make people frustrated. Though I personally know many noble-minded people from all society helping the people in need to uplift their living standard. Many Indian people become an icon in society for their philanthropic activities.

In conclusion, according to Vedanta philosophy^[S1], God dwell in each and everybody. We all human and we need everybody to make this world a far better place to live. Let us join hand of each other and with our good work, let us make our Rishis and Munis proud.