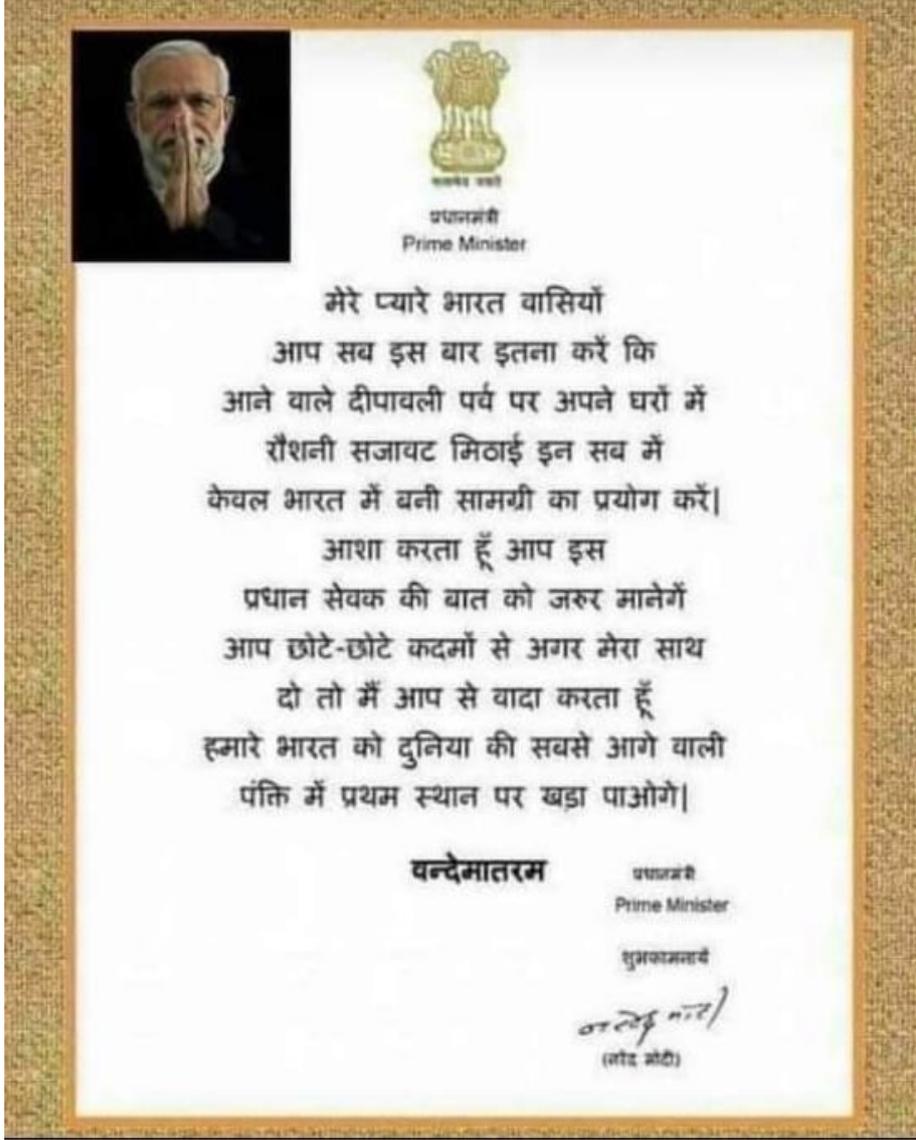


Prime Minister of Bharat (India)

His Excellency Narendra Modi wishes the world on
Diwali Celebration 2020



October 2020 | Issue 98



Coronavirus Pandemic

WHAT IS IT

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a new virus. The disease causes respiratory illness (like the flu) with symptoms such as a cough, fever, and in more severe cases, difficulty breathing.

HOW IT SPREADS

Coronavirus disease spreads primarily through contact with an infected person when they cough or sneeze. It also spreads when a person touches a surface or object that has the virus on it, then touches their eyes, nose, or mouth.

WHAT TO DO

Maintain social distancing and practise good hygiene as set out by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in conjunction with your local government laws set out.

- * Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub.
- * Practise and maintain social distancing
Keep at least one metre of distance between yourself and a person who is coughing or sneezing.
- * Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Once your hands are contaminated, the virus can be transferred through your eyes, nose or mouth where it enters your body.
- * Don't cough or sneeze into your hands. Cover your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Don't forget to throw away the tissue immediately.



Consulate General of India

Shrimati Anju Ranjan presents
Simple Books on Hindi Grammar

The Government of Bharat, (India) has always assisted with study material and study aids. Consulate General of India, Her Excellency Shrimati Anju Ranjan has upheld this tradition of assisting in the promotion of Hindi. In the picture from Left to Right: Shri Heeralall Sewnath, Consulate General Her Excellency Anju Ranjan and Shri Garrib Virjanand. The books are meant for students grappling with the study of elementary Hindi grammas. These books are in a pictorial format for the children to relate the text to the picture, thus understanding the use of Hindi grammar. The Consulate General's office has made suggestion as to the way their office will help and that a better relationship between the Branch and them will exist in the future.



Hindi Shiksha Sangh (SA)

Preparation for Bi-ennial General Meeting

President: Shri Manoj Dhanilall

The 9th Biennial General Meeting of the Hindi Shiksha Sangh is scheduled for November 21, 2020, Due to the constraints created by the Coronavirus pandemic this year, the convening of this meeting has been delayed. On the 12 July, after consultations with the relevant forums, the Executive Committee took a decision to postpone until further notice. The officials, affiliates and other stakeholders of the Hindi Shiksha Sangh convey their condolences to all members of our team who may have lost loved ones during the period.

Some of us have lost family and friends because of Covid 19, others through illnesses and tragic circumstances. We pray to Parmathma for the Mukti of their atmas.

This year we have consolidated the BGM reports into two reports, viz the President's report and the Treasurer's report, which includes our Audited Financial Statement. The content column on the left directs you to the pages of the various aspects of this report. We trust that this is in order. We also draw your attention to clause 13.1.2.3.2 (d,e,f) of our constitution as adopted on 17th July 2017. Also, the narrative report includes activities up to October 2020.

On behalf of the readers, I thank all officials, members of the Board of Management, the Academic Committee, affiliates, members of the Hindvani Management Committee, Pathshalla teachers and students, Hindvani presenters and listeners, and finally, our diligent staff for the amazing support over the past two years. While we have overcome many challenges and hurdles, we also have much to celebrate. I must make special mention of the team that comprised the Executive Committee, viz Heeralall Sewnath, Bridgerajh Ramballi and Rajeev Pattundeen for their unstinting support and commitment to upholding the values and legacy of our forebears. We have had to navigate through many sensitive challenges especially when the integrity of the Sangh had been attacked. We had to react robustly, and we have had to take firm decisions to ensure that our beloved Sangh is protected from protracted threats. All decisions were taken and implemented in the best interests of the Sangh.

We are also proud to say that the work of the Sangh has soldiered on. You would learn more of this as we progress with this report. This report has the following elements Academic, Hindvani, Culture, Social Interventions, Hindi Khabbar and we close off with certain observations and recommendations for the next Board that would be elected. We thank you for your co-operation in this regard.

हिन्दी खबर : दक्षिण अफ्रीका Hindi Khabar, South Africa : October 2020

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Professor Ashwin Desai
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Sociology



**Professor Desai writes on the celebration of the “First Diwali”
in South Africa, its struggles and tribulations...**

Over 80% of the indentured who arrived in Port Natal were Hindus. It is one of the fascinating aspects of history that the first official recognition of Diwali was in 1910, fifty years after the very first landing.

To the Colonial White population in Natal, Hindu migrants were “heathens” and when you married, under religion, was written this very word. As JD Kelly wrote: ‘The colonial Europeans had little comprehension of, or patience for, the Indian religious tamasas, ritual festivals of indenture days. They saw heathen, ungodly, lewdness, dangerous tumult and disorder, and more evidence of the Indians bad character.’

For the authorities, the indentured were beasts of burden, cogs in a labouring machine. Witness the words of the Medical Officer of Stanger Dr HW Jones written in 1900:

Mr. Hulett, you don't err on the side of mercy in the treatment of coolies. During the summer months you make your Indians toil in the blazing sun from sunrise to sunset, a period of twelve or thirteen hours...It is not an unknown incident for Indians to drop down in the field from sheer exhaustion. You profess a lot of Christianity, the psalm smiling machine is on the jog nearly the whole day-but you don't practice it.

There were certain sugar barons who demanded that an indentured woman spend her wedding night with him. Overseers who brazenly raped women on the sugar-cane field. Witness the testimony of Sasamah:

‘I am the wife of Chengadoo of Rydal Vale Estate, Duffs Road. I am employed on the estate as field labourer. Three Mondays ago, the overseer asked me to lie with him. I refused. He asked me several times after this to lie with him. I declined to do so on all occasions. On Monday week last in the afternoon I was put to work alone apart from other women close to a cane field. I refused to work alone. He said that I must work where he says. I was doing my work. He left me and came back a few minutes after and said that he would have connection with me. With that he carried me into a large cane field. I cried out for help but there were no one working near to hear my cry. He carried me and threw me on my back in the field. He lifted my cloth and got between my legs. Before committing the act, he stuffed cloth in my mouth and had connexion with me. I felt he passed semen into me. Before leaving me, he said if I told anyone he would cut my throat.’

Vellach complained to the Deputy Protector that Hulley, her employer, offered to pay her for sex while she was in his bedroom while she was cleaning; ‘He came in, striking his pocket saying he would give me 3 if I would lie with him, as the mistress and her family had gone to town. I refused saying my husband would beat me. He said he would not tell him.’ Hulley's defence was that he could not have made this proposition because Vellach was ‘unattractive.’ He was found not guilty. Sasamah's case yielded similar results. The employer's word was sacrosanct.

In this context of casual everyday brutality, the story of Rama and Sita becomes a potent source of inspiration. The indentured too saw themselves as exiled like Rama: ‘Bereft of goods, a mendicant, as slave, Rama to spend fourteen years in the woods. In the Ramayana, Sita is portrayed as the faithful wife, Rama as the brave warrior and Ravana as evil. In Sita, the indentured men saw the model of a faithful wife, many of them having left their wives in India, or had partners who were constantly open to abuse, as the case of Sasamah illustrates. In the figure of the evil Ravana, they saw a ‘model of the delusions of powerful evil’, not unlike the overseers, Sirdars and employers they confronted daily. The play had a powerful resonance amongst the indentured population, as it showed that whatever the challenges faced, good would always overcome evil.

At a time when slave-like conditions gave people a feeling of what John Berger called 'undefeated despair', how more powerful a narrative to grip the imagination and give people hope than the story of Rama and Sita?

Historical records reveal that despite the warnings and violence meted out by the bosses, in their limited time-off, the indentured used drama and music to keep their spirits going. Take the case of Durga, indentured number 84560, who worked for WB Turner of Howick. Durga told the Indian Protector in 1903 that around 7.00 pm, he and 'the other Indians were sitting in my house and passing our time by singing songs. My master came to the house and took the drum from me and chopped it to the ground. When it didn't break, he went and brought an axe and chopped it into four pieces. Turner admitted breaking the drum 'because they would not stop playing and singing all night'.

But the indentured refused to stop dancing and singing, remembering traditions left behind. One is reminded of Rumi: 'Don't worry about saving those songs/And if one of our instruments breaks/It doesn't matter/We have fallen into place/where everything is music'.

Despite the poverty wages and a system that historian Hugh Tinker described as a new form of slavery, the indentured built numerous temples in those initial years. Employees of the Durban Corporation, who were housed in the Railway and Magazine Barracks in the city centre, built three temples in the 1880s. Of these, the Durban Hindu Temple in Somtseu Road still exists, and continues to host the major celebration of Ram Navami. Babu Talwantsing and Chundoo Sing, both of whom came as indentured workers, founded the Gopallal Hindu Temple in Verulam in 1888. One of the financiers of the Umgeni Road Temple, originally built in 1885 was a woman, Amrotham Pillay, who came as an indentured migrant.



The 95-year-old Shri Vishnu temple at the Magazine Barracks that was eventually destroyed under the Group Areas Act in 1966

Temples were a powerful source of comfort for many, as it was here that communal worship was experienced, birth, marriage and death ceremonies observed, and festivals celebrated. These were the very first incubators of community in an environment of incredible hostility. The only time the indentured could leave the plantation was for three days to celebrate Muharram, what the whites called "coolie Christmas". Despite being a Muslim celebration, indentured of all religions arrived in the city to celebrate. They took over the city and often fought pitched battles with each other. In 1891, the Superintendent of Police, Richard Alexander, reported: 'On Sunday morning, during the Divine Service the public were distracted by tom-tomming carried out in the Railway Compound. I went myself to stop it. I found about 1,500 half-drunk coolies...I stopped the tom-tomming but heard it again before I reached home.'

In 1908, divine intervention arrived in the struggle for some official recognition of Diwali. Swami Shankeranand arrived on these shores and immediately took up the struggle for Diwali to be officially recognised. Initially, the colonial authorities fobbed him off, mockingly inquiring, 'how many coolie Christmases do you want to have?' But he persisted, sending letter after letter. In January 1910, the education department declared Diwali a school holiday. Encouraged by this, in April 1910, Shankeranand organised a massive Ram Navami Festival. Participants met at the Umgeni Road Temple, and after the speeches, a crowd of approximately 4 000, accompanied by chariots, marched through the streets of Durban chanting "Shree Ramchandrajii". When the procession returned to the temple, a feast was laid on and three wrestling bouts between North and South Indians, at which the African Chronicle newspaper reported 'indentured Indian [South] was the best'. It was an impressive display and

the white authorities took note, with the Durban Municipality granting employees a day off to celebrate Diwali. And so, it came to be that in 1910, Diwali took to the streets of Durban.

108 years later, I stand at the Durban Drive-in, watching thousands of people come in search of spirituality and shopping. I want to tell each one about the long and historic struggle to make Diwali a reality, the sacrifices made to build the very first temples and how, even in the depths of despair, they sang and danced to the rhythms of their gods.

I want to tell them that over a decade ago, at the height of apartheid's power, my father and I drove past



Muharram procession, early 1900, Durban



this Drive-in. I was seven years old, already a veteran of the Raj and Avalon Cinemas. I saw the silhouettes flickering in the distance. I begged my father to drive in. He stopped on the side of the road and put me on the roof of our borrowed Zodiac. He did not have the heart to tell me we were not allowed to enter this citadel of white privilege. Today, we take the Diwali at the Drive-in for granted, oblivious to previous struggles and turning our back on those still to be fought.

This Diwali, when you burst those fireworks and gorge on one more sweetmeat, spare a thought for those who fought so hard to keep the spirit of Hinduism alive. A Hinduism full of desire for justice and an inner force of hope. Spare a thought too for the present Kali Yuga and how those old stories from the Gita can help inspire new generations.

What the history of indenture teaches us is that good only overcomes evil, not because it is written in the scriptures, but because it is fought for.

Ashwin Desai is Professor of Sociology at the University of Johannesburg. The story of Diwali is recorded in the award-winning book *Inside Indian Indenture*, co-authored with Professor Goolam Vahed. A limited number of signed copies will be available at Ike's Books in Florida Road.

हिन्दी की ज्योति जलती रहे

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