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Khizar Khalil

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Student perspectives on worship services from Instructor Jennifer Garvin-Sanchez's Religious Studies 108 Human Spirituality undergraduate course at Virginia Commonwealth University.

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Durga Temple

by Khizar Khalil

For my final Field trip I decided I wanted to learn about the Hindu religion so I decided to go to a Temple called a Durga Temple located near my house. The location of this temple was 8400 Durga Place Fairfax Station, VA. What made me interested in visiting this temple was an old friend who I had in high school. He just really had a great influence in my life and always told me to strive for the best. I went to this temple on the date of 11/25/2015. I went with a friend who is named Nikhil Tuteja his phone number is 571-425-8876. Nikhil used to be a coordinator at Durga temple but then moved away for a while so he had to leave. He showed me the all the amazing things inside of this beautiful temple.

The outside of the temple is a square shaped building which has a pyramid type shape on the top of it. It also has other smaller pyramid shapes on it which are on the corners of the building. This temple is a place of worship for Hindu people. There are many priests at this temple and their duties are to provide religious services in the temple and also outside of the temple in other locations. Major Hindu celebrations and festivities are held at the temple. The temple also holds many cultural education activities. The inside of the temple is wide and very open. There aren't many chairs because most people either stand and there rituals or they sit on the ground. There are different sections for the different gods they pray to. It's very bright and it they have statues of their gods which flowers and

candles all around the gods and its very interesting to see how everything worked.

The visitors greeted me very kindly and were extremely friendly. They treated me as if I was a part of their own. This made me feel very positive and happy about my visit to the temple. Most people came from the same community the Fairfax/Lorton location. Mainly people above there thirty's attended the Durga temple and kids would be there who were brought from with their parents. Most people were from India and some from other countries near India. The people that come there are mainly from the middle class. The dominate gender at the temple was definitely mainly but there are a good amount of woman there. When I went there were about 25 people present at the temple.

Some people offered to sit with me and tell me how the temple works and how the other people spoke with me briefly. But Nikhil had the time to show me what was going on in temple. I was comfortable sitting on the ground and speaking to people. It reminded me of the masjid and a bit of the Gurdwara I went to for the second field trip paper.

They started to tell me how everything works at the temple and how there is a dress code at the temple. No short shirts or skirts inside the temple and you have to take off your shoes before entering the temple which made it seem very respectful. They make you have this

dress code to show the respect to the gods and goddesses of the religion. People of the religion come to the temple with their sorrows and prayers. They say not to point your feet at the statues of the gods as it is deemed to be very disrespectful.

What I learned is that not all temples are all alike. Many of them are different with some different beliefs and such. The bell is rung when you come inside so that the prayers of the people are heard from the gods. They fold their hands in front of the deity and pray and make their worships. They offer milk to the Lord Shiva who is the main god to the Hindus. They also offer laddus which is a sweet apart of the culture and also offer oil to the Lord Shani and Lord Ganesha who accepts this and listens to each person's prayers. There is a Pundit(a person) that puts a tikka (red marking of herbs and spices) on everyone's for heads. The pundit gives a Prasad which is purifies the souls.

Everything in the temple was pretty casual except when the people begin their prayers the ring the bell and begin to make prayers to the gods which gets intense. The opening of the temple is dramatic and casual at the same time. I feel as if it is very emotional for the people and the pundits there that see the people praying hard and telling the gods their problems, also seeking help to better their lives. It was very ritualistic and it was not very spontaneous.

I saw many symbolic statues of all the gods in the temple and that is very symbolic for the people of the religion. I explained the rituals they used earlier in the paper talking about how the pundit puts the tikka on the people to show a symbol of the body being purified

and cleansed. I had an amazing experience at the Durga temple. It was very similar to the Gurdawara I went to and a little similar to the Mosque I visited earlier in the year. I saw how everyone was going about the Hindu religion and how they practice it. I was really surprised that you also have to clean yourself and show much respect the building and the gods. My friend really showed me everything that was very special to him and I got to learn how his religion while he was showing me his passion which was his religion. •

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