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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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Hindu Center of Virginia

by Autumn Entzminger

I attended the Hindu Center of Virginia on Thursday, October 29, 2015 at 5:00 p.m. The address of the Hindu Center of Virginia is 6051 Springfield Road which is located in Glen Allen, Virginia. The service directors name was Laxmi Suresh and he was a short guy but seemed very humble and approachable. He a good job of making everyone feel comfortable and not like outsiders.

The center was about 25 minutes away from where I live and it was at a nice location and was easy to find. When I first pulled up to the Hindu Center of Virginia my initial reaction was that it was small but looked well kept.. I saw two elephants when pulling up to the place and lots of plants and gardening. I noticed that the center had nice scenery and design. The center didn't look really old but I could tell that it wasn't a new building. The parking was good and I was able to park close to the building and it wasn't really crowded or busy and I liked that.. There wasn't anybody directing us where to park but that was fine because it wasn't crowded and I was able to find parking on my own. Walking to the center no one really spoke everyone just kept to themselves. I was by myself and I didn't know what I was doing so I was a little nervous walking into the center especially in a area I had never been to before. Before I went I didn't have any background knowledge of what this religion does during services or any practices they do.

Walking in to the center i didn't know what to expect or what I was doing so I asked one of the people who worked there for a little guidance. He showed me to this room where everyone was removing their shoes and placing their coats. I was confused and didn't really know why they were doing that. I followed everyone else to another room which similar to a sanctuary in a church. The inside looked very cultural for the religion as they had decorations and flowers similar to an Indian design. The inside of the sanctuary the walls were very colorful and beautifully designed. I was asking some people there why everything was designed the way it was and if it meant anything. The response was that the design was normal for a hindu service. The lady was able to explain to me a little why it was designed like that and found it helpful and generous.

Most of the people at the center where of Indian decent and there was some older people there with their families. It was a mixture of all different ages and it was mostly families together. There would be like a mom and dad with their children and then some elderly people with them as well. I don't know exactly what class they were in but I would say a mixture of lower class to middle class. I would say the mood of the place and everyone in there was peaceful and no one talking loud it was more quiet and calm. The people seemed normal not too excited to be there but just normal. What i thought was usual was that everyone kept to themsleves and their families

strangers weren't talking to each other. Usually in the religious services I've been to everyone is excited and happy and all greeting each other with smiles.

After some time of observing the scenery the director of the service walked in and was introducing himself to people. Once he came to me I was nervous to talk to him because i didn't know how he would act but he was very soft spoken and was able to inform me of what would be taking place during the service. After he gave me an ideal of what to expect I felt better about the place and more informed so he was helpful. There were no seats in the sanctuary so when everyone was praying we had to get on the ground. Before I went to the service I didn't know a lot about the religion so at times I didn't know everything they were doing. After doing some research i realized that they believe there is one god that takes on different forms. It's still considered a monotheistic religion their God just has different forms. During the service they did many practices including chanting and drinking holy water. I didn't know what each practice was exactly for or what it meant to them. After doing some research about the practices they do and what it means I realized the taking off the shoes is suppose to represent cleanliness since your entering a holy temple. Overall I think the service was interesting to see a different religion and it was an experience.

The service lasted until around 8 p.m. so it was about 3 hours long. I was a little out of my comfort zone with this field trip especially since I was by myself. I was nervous about going to the service by myself because I thought I wouldn't know what I was doing or that people would look at me weird. When i got there no one really looked at me weird I

just don't think they really cared about anyone else they kept to themselves and their families. I don't think the people there were too friendly and thats something I didn't like. I did like seeing a different religion for myself and actually experiencing what they practice. I probably wouldn't go back if I had the opportunity but it was an experience. Before I went to the Hindu Center I didn't know a lot about the religion or stuff that they do during the service but now I feel informed and more educated about the religion and the practices. I was able to learn about the taking off the shoes and what practices they have during the service. •

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