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## Hindu Center of Virginia

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# Hindu Center of Virginia

by Janelle Hertzog

On Tuesday October 27, 2015 my friend Daija, who is also a student in this class, and I went to the Hindu Center of Virginia located at 6051 Springfield Rd Glen Allen, VA 23060. We went to the 5 PM to 8 PM service but we arrived at 5:30 PM and service did not start until 6:00 PM. Their denominational affiliation is Hinduism and the presiding official or priest was Raja Gopal- Thappal.

When we pulled up to the center there was a large open gate in front and there were beautiful elephants around the gate, which were very welcoming. There was a fairly long “drive-way” I guess you could say to get to the center but the building was beautiful, it looked like a temple in Egypt. The building was tan and long with many windows. On the roof there were thick, pillar looking things, which reminded me the most of a temple in Egypt. Around the entrance of the building was a brick fence that did not close. In the middle of the fence was almost a courtyard with a tall golden pillar in the center.

A lady walking in front of us took off her shoes and went and prayed in front of the golden pillar which kind of caught us off guard. We were not sure if we had to do that or not but we didn't. When we entered the building the ceiling to the front room was very high and immediately we noticed a room where our shoes and coats were supposed to go. I guess we looked really confused because an older man named M. B. Veer came up to us and

asked us if he could help us. We explained to him how we were students and how we wanted to participate in their worship. He began by explaining to us what their worship was about. He said that God is the spirit within all of us and that we are all the same and no one person is better than the other. He said everything they do is to become one with God. After he was done talking we took off our shoes and coats and he introduced us to the priest, Raja Gopal-Thappal.

We met the priest in the second and biggest room of the building. This room had 14 absolutely beautiful statues, which later we were told that they were deities who were a manifestation of the one true God. Each of them was different with different bright colorings, my favorite being the gold on each. They were all so beautifully made and each had a separate room they were in. Along the walls were different arrays of beautiful flowers, some in the shape of symbols. We were told that in India typically the temples would be filled with real beautiful flowers. Some of the deities had offerings in front of them. The offerings included such things as flowers and fruits. Each deity was worshipped on a different day and M. B. Veer took the time to explain to us the background behind the one that was being worshipped that day. Its name was Sri Bhakta Hanuman and it had the face of a monkey. He told us that God had constructed a bridge with that monkey; it was a very interesting story. After he finished with the story he told us to

go look around at all of the Deities and examine each but not to go up on the steps to them because only the priests could get that close to them. It was sacred holy ground.

As we were observing the different deities we noticed that as people came in they prayed to each of them; women, children, and men. One man even walked around one of the deities a few times while praying, it was very different. We eventually set down to take in the worship, or temple as they call it, and made a few observations. There were about 10-15 people in attendance, most of them being couples and small families. The women were in traditional wear and the men were in regular clothing, which was very interesting. During temple the priest was singing and talking in the Indian language and the people attending would sing with him, it was very beautiful although his singing or talking sounded like he was participating in an auction. There was only one row of chairs to sit in and some people sat on the floor.

The priest would close the curtain to the deity at times while everyone was singing and while he was singing. While the curtain was open he put flowers around a small deities neck. We asked the priest why it was necessary to take off our shoes before we went into temple. He said to us that it was for the tradition of hygiene and sanity but also because back in the day everyone wore leather shoes and they believed that the shoes took a life and they did not want those soul in temple. We also asked him what the definition of a successful service is to them. He told us that it would be to become one with the spirit of God and for everyone to come together.

The experience we had at the Hindu Center of

Virginia was amazing. Everyone was so welcoming and kind and wholeheartedly wanted us to know about their service and were willing to explain everything to us. It was very different from the experience we had during the first field trip to the Catholic Church due to the fact that the Catholic Church was sterner and less welcoming. I felt comfortable the entire time and at the Catholic Church I did not feel as comfortable. Temple was very casual to me and I really enjoyed it even though before we went I was very scared and timid to go. It is something that is different than my faith and beliefs and I was not sure if I wanted to embark on this. My mom actually even told me not to go and did not think it was a good idea. At the end of the day I am glad I did go though, it was a nice experience. •

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