Hindu Center of Virginia

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Tuesday, October 27, 2015 at 6:00 p.m., at the Hindu Center of Virginia, I attended a temple service. The address of the Hindu Center of Virginia is 6051 Springfield Road in Glen Allen, Virginia. The presiding official of the service was a priest named Raja Gopal-Thappal. He was greatly welcoming and helpful, in addition, devotee M.B. Veer offered a lot of assistance in my understanding of what was taking place.

Upon pulling up to the property I rode through gates with metal elephants on each side. Outside there was a large, golden, pillar-like object directly in front of the entrance that I observed a woman pray to prior to entering the temple. Inside, there was a room which I would compare to a mud room in a home, where you remove your shoes and place your coats. Once you walked through the lobby you entered the sanctuary. The walls of the sanctuary were lined with 14 colorful deities, each having their own separate compartment showcases. I was allowed to get but so close to the showcase before it was considered holy space in which only officials could touch. The temple had many colorful, fake flowers that were explained to me to be simply for decoration and the real ones are typical of India.

A regular devotee of the center, M.B. walked in at the same time as myself with his wife and immediately asked how he could assist me. Others gave a kind smile but kept to themselves. I felt perfectly comfortable around everyone. M.B. gave me a general idea of what would take place and then guided me to the priest, Raja. Both gentlemen were generous with their time and patience answering any questions I had. I observed that the majority of the community of people at the Hindu Center were Indian and I noticed most that came were couples and small (3-4 person) families. On average, I would say the age of the devotees was mid-thirties and less than 20 people were present.

From my understanding based off of what was explained to me, the Hindu people believe that God is the spirit within all of us. Our spirit is no different than that of an animals and we are all the same, no one thing better than the other. The Hindu people worship deities because they believe that each deity is the manifestation of the one true God and was sent down to complete different tasks and to help my understanding of this M.B. made the parallel of Jesus in the Christian faith.

Individuals start service by removing their shoes before entering the sanctuary. This practice in a sense of tradition is a result of desiring cleanliness and good hygiene in the holy space. In very early times worshippers did not have access to a means to be fully cleanly so they would remove their shoes. From a more spiritually traditional aspect, again, during early periods of Hinduism most shoes were made of leather, a dead animal. Worshipers of Hinduism do not believe in
ideal husband, wife, brother and friend. As an offering, Sri Rama is often given flowers. These flowers tie into the story that God asked for Rama to deliver a specific flower and being unsure which one it was Rama delivered an entire mountain of flowers for everyone to choose from.

I enjoyed the break down of the deities because that was a concept I always struggled with understanding. I never grasped the concept of the Hindu faith having one true God yet, they worshipped multiple. All in all the field trip was a good experience in which my perspective and understanding of the Hindu religion grew.

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