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## Rajdhani Mandir

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# Rajdhani Mandir

by Chandni Malik

On November 23rd, around 4:00 PM I had a dear friend of mine, Roshni, take me to her place of worship. The place she took me was called Rajdhani Mandir (temple), located at 4525 Pleasant Valley Rd, Chantilly, VA 2015. In India the presiding officials go by the name “Pandit”. The Pandit present at the time at the Mandir I attended was named Pandit Ram Sneh Tripathi J. Roshni had told me that everyday at 8 AM and 7PM they would have an Aarti (prayer) but we weren’t able to make it at that time.

The Mandir’s outside appearance was very simply colored with gray and white but is very structured, the top of the building it was a pyramid like roof. There is a small flight of stairs to walk up before entering, one you enter the building I quickly noticed that is was extremely quiet. Roshni directed me to the right once we had walked in and there was a small room where everyone would take off their shoes and there was a little faucet in the corner where people could wash their feet, it was a sign of respect to walk in the holy room with clean feet. After we took our shoes off, we walked out of the room back towards the door and right in front of it there was another set of doors which lead to the holy room.

We quietly walked in and I noticed there weren’t many people but majority of the people were families, adults with their kids. The room was very spacey and nicely set up, the floor was all carpeted in a deep red color and

it had a very calming smell of incense. All the way in the front there was a set of small stairs and above it there were four different large statues separated, which are their gods, each god had a different significance. Around this area there was a little hallway that went all the way around, Roshni explained and showed me later on that around were little windows with other gods they worship, they walk to each one and pray to them. In front of each god there is a small box where you can donate money to the god you worship the most.

The atmosphere was conservative and some of the ladies had a scarf slightly covering their head and they all seemed to be fully clothed, meaning no shorts or short sleeves. Roshni had told me that many different cultures in India come to the temple as their place of worship. We quietly sat down Indian style near the back, Roshni explained to me that she comes and prays for anything she lacks in life or for any sins to be forgiven, she closed her eyes and prayed quietly, I also gave it a try and did the same. As I opened my eyes I felt a sudden feeling of inner peace come to me and it was actually very surprising and relieving.

She told me to just sit tight and watch her, she walked up to the front and there was the Pandit sitting right at the end of the stairs on a cushion. She kneeled in front of The Pandit and she gives him respect by saying “Namaste” with her hands together and he says hello and dips his finger in a red like substance and

leaves a circular mark on her forehead then ties a red string around her wrist, after that he hands her a fruit. After, there is a large box next to the Pandit where she puts in some money and this box is for money donations that goes towards the Mandir for volunteer and holy services that are held there. Roshni comes back to me and explained that the red dot symbolizes the third eye, the string is called Kalava was put on her right wrist because she was single and married woman it's tied on the left, wearing the Kalava simply symbolizes an allegiance to the Hindu faith, and lastly the fruit was given as like a gracious gift.

Roshni wanted to show me around the rest of the building so we both got up and walked out the doors but before we did she touched the ground and then touched her head, then closed her eyes for a minute, it meant she was asking for a blessing before she walks out. Once we got out the room on the other end there was a door with a stairway that takes you downstairs. Downstairs there were several doors leading to rooms, some rooms were usually used for classes which they had for kids on Sunday's and these classes were to teach about the Hindu religion and how to read, write, and speak in Hindi. There was also a kitchen that is used to make food for volunteer trips, certain prayers, and for big events they held for holidays and occasions that could be reserved by individuals. One room she showed me was very large that took up most of the basement area and it had a stage in the front, they would hold performances by the kids in the classes such as dances or acting out religious scenes.

Overall it was an interesting and warming experience, I felt the most comfortable and

welcomed at the Mandir more than the Mosque and Gurdwara I had visited previously. It was very fascinating to learn about the different things in the Hindu religion and how much symbolism is used in each thing that is given to each person. Even though I just observed and didn't interact as much the atmosphere and aroma gave me a feeling of calmness and peace. If my friend invited me to the Mandir again, I would absolutely go. •

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