

Hinduism

South Piedmont Community College

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The religion that I chose to write about is Hinduism and the individuals I chose to interview are my very close friend Madelyn and her mother Anita. Both Madelyn and Anita are both full Indian and practice Hinduism. Unfortunately, I was unable to interview them in person, due to the fact they live in Virginia; however, we were able to compromise with an over the phone interview. Over the course of the interview, I asked all twelve of the questions to both Madelyn and her mother and recorded both of their individual responses. After the interview, I can say that not only did I learn a lot about the Hindu faith, but grew a strong sense of appreciation for it as well.

Hinduism is an Indian religion and is the third largest religion in the world. The essential teachings of the Hindu faith are broken down into three basic teachings; these teachings are known as Dharma, Karma and Moksha. Dharma refers to the religious duties of the Faith, following the principles and guidelines, etc. Karma refers to the idea that an individual's future is based on their past actions, whether or not they were good or bad. Lastly, Moksha refers to the state where the individuals escapes their sufferings of the world through death. Hinduism sacred scripture is based on the Vedas, which are four sacred texts. In regards to the founder of Hinduism differs from other religions because it does not have a specific founder; their teachings

and philosophy is single handedly based upon the vedas. When it comes to worship, Hindu worship is very individualized and is not entirely organized. For instance, it is not mandatory for the worship to take place in the temple, but prayers can take place both in the temple and at home. During worship, there is a lot of prayer that takes place, as well as gift giving to idols. In addition to this, there is usually flowers, rice and incense involved; there is usually always some form of light involved as well. One particular form of worship is known as Puja. Puja actually means “to pray.” Puja is a form of worship that can take place at home as well and does not necessarily require a Mander. Mander is the word used to describe the temples. For instance, you go to the Mander, that is your temple. There are many temples for different gods and goddesses as well.

When it comes to visitors, not only are they extremely welcome but encouraged. Madelyn’s father and Anita’s husband, Bill is actually full American and married into his Hindu family. One of the aspects of Hinduism I found to be particularly beautiful, is that you don’t have to be born into the religion. Anita went on to describe this as, “it’s not so much about being a Hindu, but practicing Hinduism.” As for the behavior of visitors, they are expected to show the utmost respect, dress accordingly, but most importantly be open-minded. Unlike Catholicism, you are not required to be a Hindu to participate in the activities; it is very inclusive and visitors are always encouraged to join in.

In regards to the significant rites of practices and other rituals, the Hindu faith is very much a ceremonial religion. Several ceremonies take place that involve blessings for specific significant events. These events can include but are not limited to, births, new homes, starting a business, weddings, etc. For example, “ganesh puja” refers to a blessing ceremony that is

performed at weddings. In addition to this, the Hindu Faith has several of their own holidays, all which are based upon the Lunar calendar. For instance, Diwali is the Hindu version of both New Year and Christmas; Diwali is the most important holiday in the Hindu faith, and the day which it occurs changes each year. Another example of one of these sacred holidays is, Rakhi. Rakhi is a holiday that takes place between brothers and sisters; during this holiday an exchange takes place between the brother and sister. For instance, Madelyn's brother, Wil gives her money and in exchange she prays for him. This tradition carries out with cousins as well; in Indian culture cousins are viewed as equivalent to siblings and Hindu's often refer to their cousins as brother and sister.

When it comes to the role of men, women and children in the Hindu Faith, there is a great difference between these roles in India versus America. Unfortunately, Hinduism in India can oftentimes be sexist when it comes to the roles of a woman. For instance, women are expected to take the role of preparing the altar, food, etc. However, the majority of prayers are led by men; religious men are referred to as Pundits. However, in America, Hinduism is very westernized and modernized; it is much more open minded and there is no so much significance placed on the individual roles of men and women. As for children, the roles remain pretty much the same; children are expected to take place in prayers as well.

In regards to Hinduism's attitude towards other religions, they have the utmost respect. Hindu's are incredibly open to other religions, especially considering the fact that they are a religion that serves many God's. I also know this to be true because one time Anita purchased a hand-made statue of Jesus Christ for my Christian mother as a gift to show respect for her religion.

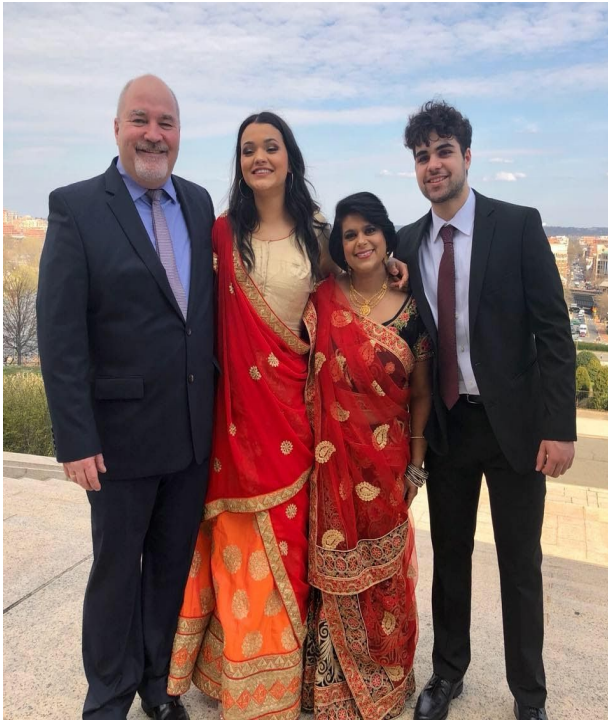
When it came to the question regarding the most important thing they wanted outsiders to know about their Faith, both Madelyn and Anita provided different answers. Madelyn's response was she wanted others to understand that Hinduism should be given the same respect as other religions; she gave me several examples where she felt her religion has been appropriated at times and wants people to show the same respect to Hinduism as they would give to Christianity. As for Anita's response, she finds it frustrating that Hinduism is often viewed as something exotic or mystic, when it is actually the complete opposite; "hinduism is an understanding of oneself and one's relationship with God, there is nothing mystic about that."

Lastly, the amount of people in the world who practice the Hindu Faith is approximately 900 million. According to PEW Research Center, less than 1% of those 900 million are located in North Carolina; however, I do not know how true I believe those statistics to be because I know quite a few Hindu's personally. (2015).

My favorite aspect of the Hindu faith is most definitely their openness to all religions; I consider myself to be a very spiritual individual and as someone who believes there is truth to every religion myself, I found this quality of Hinduism to be particularly beautiful. In conclusion, I already had quite a fascination with the Hindu faith prior to this interview; however, this interview truly opened my eyes to so many things about Hinduism that I did not know and allowed me to grow a sense of appreciation of their beautiful religion.

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Works Cited

“Adults in North Carolina - Religion in America: U.S. Religious Data, Demographics and Statistics.” *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project*, 11 May 2015, <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/state/north-carolina/>.