

The purpose of my fieldwork is to learn and document the variety of Hindu stories that exist among Hindus in the South. With this intention, I conducted interviews, and I sat in on a classical Indian music and dance performance. In addition to my fieldwork, I also researched Hindu lore by watching the Mahabharat and the Ramayan television series. Hinduism does not have solitary scriptures that dictate the nature of the religion. However, these great epics are seen as important religious texts. They set the precedent for proper behavior, such as the divine behavior of a good king, respect for elders, and profits of perfect faith. This is very significant in enhancing my ability to contextualize my interviews and my experience in the temple. Also, the many journal articles and books I read served to inform me of the growing dichotomy of American and Indian Hinduism, an interesting and very recent development. After studying these articles, it was easy to see the differences that the Nashville temple had in comparison with a temple in India. The separate aspects of my research not only provided an interesting study of the life of Hindu stories in the South, but also a look into the fascinating, new world of American Hinduism.

While the focus of my research was exploring Hindu stories in the South, the majority of the articles that I read were about Hinduism in the United States in general. Most days consisted of reading such articles. Gradually, in addition to Hindu stories, I learned about a specific American Hinduism. While I built my knowledge of American Hinduism, I began to recognize correlations to the research done at other temples in the United States to the temple in Nashville. I recognized that the strange split-level architecture in the temple in Malibu, which does not exist in India, is mirrored in the Nashville temple. The shrine occupies the upper portion of the temple while the

auditorium, library, classrooms, storage closets, kitchen, and bathrooms occupy the lower portion. In India, temples do not have this division mostly because the gods must be connected to the earth, but it is fairly commonplace in America. Also, scholars have noted that the lower level of the temples have become more domestic. Trips to the temples take longer in the United States because they are so spread out, which coaxes families to stay longer. Coupled with the desire to feel closer to their heritage, this means that temples in America are much more social. The lower portion of the temple must adapt to this, so it has become much more domestic. This domesticity can be illustrated in the rising influence of females in temple life. I noticed that during the dinner after the dance performance, the women controlled the kitchen. The men set out the tables and the platters of food for the buffet when instructed. The women also provided the snacks during the interlude. Kitchens in the temples in Indian are controlled solely by the male priests.

After reading these articles and studying the lore, I was able to take a more comprehensive look at my interviews. Dr. Mahadevan, an engineering professor who teaches classical Indian music and reads scripture, is well versed in Hindu lore. From him, I garnered what I like to consider a scholarly approach to Hindu stories in the South. He was quick to tell me that he didn't think that Hindu stories had changed at all in their new home. They still struggle to teach people the proper way to conduct their lives, though he told me stories that had to do more with culture than religion. He described one story from the Panchachantras, a series of tales narrated by animals much like Aesop's Fables, that taught the lesson of being considerate to guests. A fox invited a heron to dinner and puts water on a flat leaf. Because the heron has a long beak, he cannot drink

the water. So, when the fox comes to the heron's house for dinner, the heron puts the water in a long cylinder. Therefore, while the heron can easily drink, the fox cannot. These types of stories are aimed specifically at children and unlike other Hindu stories rarely play host to the many gods and goddesses that frequent other tales like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, which mostly focus on human error, or the Puranas, which are entirely the tales of the gods and their relations with demons. He mentioned also Amarchitrakathas or picture books. Amarchitrakathas are very much like comic books that focus on the Hindu epics and translate them in meaningful ways to children. English versions are available so children raised in the United States have no problem reading them. In this way, these stories live on in America.

While Dr. Mahadevan's approach to the interview was very academic, Mrs. Babu's approach was more personal. Mrs. Babu previously conducted the Sunday school courses at the temple. When asked what her favorite story was, she eagerly told me about an instance of Arjuna and Krishna walking in the forest. Krishna, testing to see if his friend knew that he was an incarnation of the divine, pointed to a bird in the sky, saying that it was a lovely dove. Arjuna agrees. As they continue walking, Krishna says, "That wasn't a dove. It was a crow." Arjuna says, "Oh yes, you're right." Krishna looks at him and says, "It was a parrot. Don't you have an opinion of your own? Do you just agree with everything I say?" Arjuna smiles and tells him that he is not looking with his physical eyes. His senses can fool him, but his divine eye is through Krishna. Mrs. Babu loves this story because it teaches humility, an important lesson in Hinduism. Later in the interview, when I asked what stories she wanted her children to know, she immediately came back to this story. She said that it helped her keep an open mind when she came to

America. Most of her responses to my questions about stories were analogies, which she personally finds more helpful when she wants a nonHindu to understand something about her religion. She also uses anecdotes about her grandfather, who she views as somewhat of an embodiment of living religion. Often, history and culture are preserved in our grandparents, who hold the old colloquialisms and traditions of society. Mrs. Babu's grandfather, a traditional man from a traditional village in India, is someone she can call upon to express the importance of Hindu ethics and practices. What is interesting to me is that most immigrants' grandparents remain in India so that living tradition factor that is so important to Hinduism is missing to children born in America, unless they return their parent's homeland. The festivals that run rampant in India are moderated in America. Mrs. Babu informed me that festivals were her richest source of Hindu stories when she was young. Each festival celebrated a god and each god was accompanied with a story. Of course, there are festivals hosted by temples in America but the ancient tales associated with that god and that specific town do not exist here. Therefore, the celebration must be broader. Mrs. Babu reminded me that technology has helped bridge the gap created by the land and ocean. The bollywood movies that erupt out of India, featuring the tales of dastardly Duryodhan from the Mahabharata or kingly Rama from the Ramayana, are viewed by children in the Unites States. So many of the stories from the epics are told and retold because they capture the attention of so many, and this is an ideal way for immigrants to allow their children to revel in Hindu stories.

The music and dance performance that I witnessed changed much of my perception of Hindu storytelling. Though the scenes of famous tales are dramatized in television series and comic books, I was not able to fully understand the power of these

stories until I had the wonderful opportunity to observe a traditional Indian dance. Miss Monica Cooley teaches classical Indian dance in conjunction with her husband, Dr. Mahadevan. Miss Cooley enjoyed doing a tour in India based on the Panchachantras, incorporating some of the few traditional dances that are not stories about the deities. The dance that I observed is a style with intense emotion relayed in both body gestures and facial expressions. The dancer tells the story with his or her body and expressions. They are usually accompanied by lyrics that narrate the story as well. At one instance, because many of the children and nonHindu observers did not understand the lyrics, Miss Cooley narrated the story in English first while dancer played out blunt movements one by one. Then, when Dr. Mahadevan sang and played the veena (a traditional Indian instrument), the dancer acted the movements out in sync and the crowd was able to follow the story in addition to enjoying the art involved. Also in aid of explaining the production, pamphlets were handed out. They gave a brief outline of the history of the dance and a summary of each of the stories the dancer was acting. To people like me, hurried trying to put to word the beauty of the performance in a dark seat, this was most appreciated, but it also helped open the culture to other outsiders and second generation Hindus.

Hindu myths come alive in this way. In India, such dances were prohibited from the temple for a period because they were too erotic. For example, many dances portrayed the intense love a devotee experiences for his or her deity. However, the priests soon realized that the dances were too engrained in the culture of Hinduism to forbid completely. The dances returned to halls, but not to the temples, unlike in America, where it is inconvenient and illogical to build a dance hall when Hindus already have the

temple. This is a superb way, among movies, bedtime stories and Sunday schools, for Hindus and second generation children to keep the religion alive.

In addition to academia, this internship also proved very insightful on a personal level. Professor Sid Brown was my sponsor during this internship. She made it a specific point to be only the helping hand in my research, keeping me on track and telling me when my priorities needed to shift. Without her guidance, I would not have been able to complete this internship with any of the valuable lessons that I attained. She introduced me to the self-reliance of graduate work gave ample support when needed. From splitting the rent of a hotel to meet a morning interview appointment to giving irreplaceable advice on my expectations of myself and providing me with the names of graduate programs, she was invaluable.

I do not want to spend my life doing anthropological research. I loved reading the articles, and perhaps my unease is simply because I am inexperienced, but the organization process for setting up these interviews was not something I enjoyed. This internship allowed me to taste what being in an environment that I controlled was like; the hours, the logs (which categorized how I spent my week), what I read, and how I gained my research was something that I decided, though Dr. Brown dealt helpful nudges. It was harder than I thought to apply myself without the regimen of a classroom or supervisor. Even the small responsibilities like buying groceries and fixing food became slightly bothersome, especially since I was alone. However, though I do not see myself conducting similar research anytime soon, I still felt like I brushed across my calling. Prior to the presentation I was going to demonstrate to Dr. Brown, I sat alone in the Mac room below the library. Twenty-four computers fanned in rows before the

Sabra Harris, University of the South, 1 September 2010

instructor's desk. They were empty. I was struck quite suddenly with the image of a future-me sitting at that desk as students slowly filled the room. I really liked it. I had experimented with the idea of being a professor, but I had never felt it so clearly before. This internship helped me in many ways that I never expected. The most important advice that I can give to anyone in similar circumstances is to be completely open with yourself. I feel that the most important thing I learned was self-awareness.