

Temples role in the understanding and practice of Hinduism

As a Hindu growing up in suburban America, I believe that temples play an important role in the understanding and practice of Hinduism. I agree with my father (who forced me to write this essay), that temples help me in understanding who I am. They are a testament to Hinduism and help one expand and explore their knowledge of the religion. My family and I believe it is important to take some time off our busy schedules to pray at the nearby Hindu temple.

Temples are a shrine to the Gods. Although God resides everywhere, temples give one a chance to witness the idols and various abhisekhams and poojas. In the US, some examples of poojas performed in Hindu temples are on special days like Sivarathri, a festival for Lord Siva, Krishna Jayanthi, to celebrate the birthday of Lord Krishna, and Navarathri, nine days and nine nights of celebrations on the defeat of the demon Mahisasura by the magnificent Goddess Durga. These holidays and many others are extravagantly celebrated in most Hindu temples, by lavishly decorating the idols and conducting poojas. It is vital to understand how and why these poojas are performed in order to develop your knowledge of the Hindu religion and to better oneself. Visiting a temple on auspicious days such as the ones mentioned above enables me to do so.

In addition, temples in India and other parts of Asia are important because of their vivid, abundant history. Last year, while my family and I were in South India, I visited some of the ancient temples, such as Brihadeeshwara, also known as Peruvudaiyaar, located in Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu. Some of the older temples we visited have a rich history dating back to the 6th century B.C. In addition to learning about Hinduism and religion, I also learnt about the Chola Kings and other Rajahs who built these temples, saw their magnificent architecture, and wondered how they were built without modern instruments, machinery, or electricity. I concluded that these kings and masons had divine help. Unfortunately, we also noticed that some people had inscribed graffiti - their phone numbers or initials on the walls of these ancient temples. As Hindus, it is important that we preserve these marvelous structures by continuing to worship at temples without vandalizing them.

Temples also play a significant part in Hinduism because of the intertwining relationship they had with the gods themselves. The gods have visited and / or built some of these places of worship. For instance, the Kanchipuram temple is linked to the story of Goddess Parvati building a Siva lingam out of sand and dirt. It is rumored that this Kanchipuram temple was built around the very Siva lingam created by Parvati Devi. Another famous temple is in Guruvayoor in Kerala. A popular belief is that Brihaspathi, the Deva Guru, and Vayu needed a location for the idol of Lord Vishnu. As they flew over India, they spied a town (later called Guruvayoor), where Siva and Parvathi were dancing on the banks of a beautiful lake. Guru and Vayu approached Siva, and asked for a location for installing the idol. Siva responded by saying that Brihaspathi should build a temple there itself, and Guru and Vayu agreed. A divine presence is felt when one visits these especially important temples. This demonstrates that Hindu temples are vital to the understanding of our puranas and practice of our religion.

In the US, temples greatly contribute to the expansion of Hindu religion, and also act as cultural centers. For example, most temples have a center for performing arts, such as Indian classical dance, Carnatic music, and various other activities. Also, temples can serve as a social place where one can meet other Hindus. Not only are temples great places of worship, they are also places where we can join the network of Hindus and make new friends within the Indian community. Being able to experience Indian culture is another reason why visiting temples is beneficial to all who practice Hinduism.

