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A Room With a View: Accommodating Hindu Religious Practice on a College Campus

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Abstract

This article examines the question of how to best accommodate Hindu practice on college campuses by contrasting the dedication of a prayer room with the hiring of a Hindu chaplain. The author suggests that this dichotomy—of an impersonal physical space ("a room") on the one hand, and a chaplain empowered to lead a community ("a view") on the other—is a useful way of exploring a shift in accommodating Hindu students' religious practice. The author first presents a gloss of religious practice in contemporary Hinduism. Next, he identifies the two broad approaches to accommodating Hindu practice on college campuses and discusses three important shifts that accompany moving from one approach to the other. In closing, he proposes that meaningful engagement and communication with a chaplain makes reconciliation between the two approaches possible.

A Room or a View?

A few weeks after I was appointed to direct Princeton University's pilot Hindu Life Program, I had lunch with a student named Mina.[2] Mina, who was in her final year of study, had dedicated a significant portion of her first three years on campus to helping to build the Hindu community at Princeton. As a student leader, she was an integral part of the brainstorming team that helped to conceive of the Hindu Life Program. I was eager to hear her insights about how best to accommodate Hindu religious practice. During our spirited conversation, she revealed—casually, and perhaps a bit inadvertently—that at one point, early in the process, the brainstorming team considered the idea to designate a space to function as a dedicated Hindu Prayer Room. According to Mina, the idea was discussed and eventually set aside as impractical (due to lack of available space) and problematic (due to fear that the inclusion of some iconography over others would alienate some students)[3]; the team returned to the drawing board and eventually landed upon the idea of a Hindu Life Program with a coordinator at its helm. My lunch conversation with Mina moved forward, but I found my thoughts repeatedly returning to the proposed prayer room. I was struck by the sudden realization that, had things gone another way, a prayer room might have taken my place at the university.

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[2] All names and some identifying details have been altered to protect the privacy of individuals referenced throughout this article.

[3] Scholar Vashudha Narayanan offers a more detailed exploration of how Hinduism's diverse traditions can make establishing common prayer space problematic (1996, p. 175).

I suggest that this dichotomy—of an impersonal physical space ("a room") on the one hand, and a chaplain empowered to lead a community ("a view") on the other—is a useful way of exploring a shift in accommodating Hindu students' religious practice. In the present article, I first present a gloss of religious practice in contemporary Hinduism. Next, I identify the two broad approaches to accommodating Hindu practice on college campuses and discuss three important shifts that accompany moving from one approach to the other. In closing, I propose that meaningful engagement and communication with a chaplain makes reconciliation between the two approaches possible.

Before going further, however, I must offer a caveat: My criticisms of the "room" approach may sound far harsher than I intend it—especially when applied to my colleagues who choose this very approach, at peer institutions and at my own. I do not mean to be dismissive of their work. Instead, I am intentionally being critical—even hypercritical—in order to provoke thought about what I believe to be an important shift in the way we approach accommodating religious practice.

Hindu Practice

What is Hindu practice? Answering this simple and seemingly straightforward question proves surprisingly difficult. The closest Sanskrit approximations of the word "practice"—*sadhana* and *abhyasa*—are rarely used to delineate a set of practices common to all Hindus. The *Yoga Sutras*, authored by the sage Patanjali and widely recognized as Hinduism's definitive yoga text, may contain the closest thing to a treatise on Hindu practices; the book's second chapter (*pada*) is simply entitled "Practice" (*sadhana*). Patanjali begins the chapter by offering three general practices: self-discipline, study, and devotion to God. He expands upon this later in the chapter, offering five "abstentions" (*yama*) and five "observances" (*niyama*): nonviolence, truthfulness, refraining from stealing, celibacy, renunciation of unnecessary possessions, cleanliness, contentment, austerity, study, and devotion to God (Bryant, 2009, pp. 242-252). Though these practices are specific to yoga practice, some contemporary Hindus have sought to re-vision them as broader archetypes for Hindu practices generally. A website on Hindu practices, for instance, lists these ten by name, calling them "the 10 disciplines" and even "10 commandments" of Hinduism (Das, n.d.).

For Hindus, practices are intertwined with rituals, for "ritual expresses and purveys the essence of Hindu identity" and "invites the engagement of the entire person" (Clothey, 1996, p. 128). Modern Hinduism—and especially diasporic Hinduism—favors the *pancaratra* style of worship, marked by rituals that do not depend upon specially trained or initiated priests (Narayanan, 1996). Texts of the *pancaratra* style speak of three categories of practices or ritual acts (*kriya*): daily rituals (*nitya-kriya*), the observance of special festivals (*naimittika-kriya*), and rituals specific to life transitions (*samskara*), such as marriage and funeral rites (GBC Deity Worship Group, 1994). Hindu scholar K.K.A. Venkatachari echoes this in his classification of Hindu practices as being domestic, festival, or temple rituals (1996), though Hinduism practiced in the United States tends to blur the lines between these (Narayanan, 1996).

The frameworks and categories provided by Patanjali, *pancaratra* texts, and contemporary scholars may help us to discourse about practices but offer little in terms of negotiating the challenges that arise from implementing them. For instance, premodern and modern commentators almost universally understand Patanjali's inclusion of nonviolence (*ahimsa*) as a practice to espouse a vegetarian diet (Bryant, 2009). And yet, as ethnologist Richard Burghart points out, even if some Hindus consider vegetarianism to be a hallmark of Hinduism, if we "take vegetarianism as one of the defining characteristics of Hinduism then we are led down a path of seeming nonsense" (2001, p. 339). Indeed, this was precisely the situation that

arose when the trustees of the Krishna Avanti School, the UK's first state-sponsored Hindu primary school, attempted to use being a strict vegetarian as a way of defining "practicing Hindu" (and thus a condition of entry). The episode raised such a furor that the trustees were eventually forced to retract the policy and apologize ("British Hindu School Gives Up Vegan Policy," 2007).

Accommodating Hindu Practices

The difficulty in defining and quantifying common Hindu practices has often led those tasked with accommodating these practices, such as administrators and guardians of religious life on college campuses, to choose one of two competing responses. The first is to attempt a sort of translation process that seeks equivalence by way of analogy to Christianity, and encourages students to "defend, re-define and create [a version of] Hinduism on the model of Christianity" (Thapar, 2001, p. 65). A *puja* becomes "Hindu mass," *bhajans* become "Hindu hymns," *Diwali* becomes "Hindu Christmas."[4] Hinduism is not seen as fundamentally different from other faiths, and is therefore subject to and subsumed by their discourses and frameworks. This often leads to a "Christian like congregationalizing of Hinduism" in which a place is found for Hindu practices by matching them up to their Christian counterparts (Vertovec, 2001, p. 284). Hinduism is revisioned as a "monolithic, uniform religion, paralleling some of the features of Seimitic religions" (Thapar, 2001, p. 55). When a one-to-one parity cannot be found, practitioners may have to "give up [some of] their distinctive beliefs and practices in order to merge into a 'least common denominator' form of 'generic Hinduism'" that seeks to emulate Christianity (Carman, 1996, p. 16). The likely result of this process, according to Indian historian Romila Thapar, is a "form of Hinduism parallel to Christianity or Islam and with an idiom comprehensible to these other two" (2001, p. 77).

A second response seems to take the exact opposite approach. Hinduism is viewed as inexorably and irrevocably different from and outside of the other faiths in its midst, and thus no meaningful discourse, comparison, or translation is truly possible. Hindus are ostensibly "honored" by being excused from participation in shared discourse. They are consciously or subconsciously kept out of conversations around religious founders and prophets, theologies of social justice, the role of religious texts, or responses to world events. Such an approach, carried further, may even question Hinduism's status as a religion altogether; religion may be defined in such a specific and narrow way that only Semitic religions would fit into it (Tripathi, 2001). One might argue, for instance, that "'India does not have any true religion because religion, in the true sense of the term, should be defined as…such such such… and these characteristics do not apply to Hinduism'" (Tripathi, 2001, p. 122). While this rarely happens in such explicit ways, it may be expressed more subtly. For instance, on campuses where administrators opt for such a response, "interfaith" dialogue is likely to be defined as a meeting of Abrahamic traditions and couched in the rhetoric of "people of the Book," "the children of Abraham," or even "the three monotheistic religions" (Joshi, 2006). A (separate) place is thus found for Hindu practice by *contrasting* it from these other faiths.

While these two responses may appear to be in conflict, I would argue that they share a guiding paradigm and are rooted in the same basic assumptions, and are thus two sides of the same proverbial coin. For instance, both responses adopt a paternalistic posture toward Hindu students. Both implicitly accept a particular faith or group of faiths (Protestant Christianity, or, increasingly, a Protestantized version of the

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[4] There is a growing body of scholarship critiquing this type of analogizing. For instance, author Rajiv Malhotra (2011) and scholar Khyati Joshi (2006) both see such attempts as evincing a Christian bias.

aforementioned "three monotheistic religions") as the measuring stick by which Hinduism must be dealt with—either through similarity or contrast. And both envisage administrators as the benevolent gatekeepers of religious legitimacy, doling out *space* and *time* to Hindu students who function as passive recipients.

I suggest that a third alternative—one marking a departure from these assumptions—is possible, and may prove more effective in accommodating Hindu practice in a meaningful way. Colleges and universities can empower leaders and guides from within the tradition to serve as chaplains; such chaplains can work with students to collectively identify and address their religious needs. As co-religionists, Hindu chaplains can sympathize with the challenges faced by Hindu students in "owning" the particularities of their tradition. While appreciating ways in which the Hindu faith may not conform to Western models of religion, they can demonstrate that "it is not necessary to abandon the term Hinduism or deny it the status of a religion" in order to engage with its complexity (Ferro-Luzzi, 2001, p. 294). As dedicated professionals in the field of religious life, they can help students learn to adapt their tradition to be relevant to the time and place they find themselves in, and address questions such as *how much change is permitted* and *how can the tradition be adapted*—both by encouraging students to wrestle with the tensions and by modeling such wrestling themselves (Venkatachari, 1996).

Of course, a Hindu chaplain would also engage in a type of translation work, but I would suggest that there are two important distinctions. First, a Hindu chaplain's efforts would constitute "a tentative translation" exercised with "due caution and respect" (Carman, 1996, p. 20). Chaplains are in a unique position to serve as religious spokespersons, and "by seeing Hinduism's spokespersons as translators," we may access a view of "the present in terms of the past, [and] the 'here' in terms of the 'there'" to define the essential characteristics of modern Hinduism (Burghart, 2001, pp. 341–342). Second, the chaplain's status as an insider would allow him or her to engage students in a "more discursive, reflective style of Hinduism, generally oriented by . . . a quest for understanding of what it is to be Hindu; for self-conscious legitimation; for finding a viable Hindu *nomos* for the boundary situation in which they live" (Clothey, 1996, p. 136).

Moving from the "room" approach (typified by the first two responses) to the "view" approach (represented by the third response described above) speaks to three shifts in the way we approach religious accommodation more broadly. I will now explore these in reference to three types of Hindu practice: a weekly worship service (a stand-in for temple-based practices), vegetarian observance (an example of domestic practice), and a Hindu wedding (a life transition).

From the Impersonal to the Relational

The "room" approach focuses on accommodating religious need by providing resources—usually physical space, funding, time, or permission. The "view" approach, in sharp contrast, concerns itself primarily with providing the opportunity for relationship. My first year at Princeton provided a rather vivid illustration of how differently these two approaches could impact students' religious practice.

For several years before the inauguration of the Hindu Life Program, the Office of Religious Life had been providing the Hindu student organization on campus with space and a modest budget to hold a weekly "worship service." The components of this service were never defined or discussed, so the students patched together a gathering called *satsang*. As upperclassmen that had previously been active with creating and running the *satsang* (like Mina, whom I mentioned earlier in this article) became busy with graduation preparation, attendance at the weekly event fell sharply. Vijay, a particularly brilliant student with a penchant for argumentation and debate, became the new president of the student group. True to his proclivity,

Vijay organized a series of philosophical discussions on the meaning of Hindu worship and Hinduism itself. Using the same sort of "Hindus-are-too-dissimilar to be compared" logic mentioned earlier, he convinced his fellow students that the idea of a weekly Hindu worship service was an artificial construct. Furthermore, Vijay persuaded the other students, the idea of Hinduism as a religion was itself a construct; the most "Hindu" thing to do, he argued, was for the students to disband the weekly gathering and keep their spirituality confined to their dorm rooms! Soon, the students had de-constructed themselves out of existence.

Concerned, I called for a meeting with the student leaders. Rather than argue for the necessity of a weekly Hindu gathering, or attempt to lock horns with Vijay over his interpretation, I shared my own experiences, as a student and a chaplain, of gathering together as a community. I invited students who had temple communities they identified with while at home to share their own experiences, and list out aspects of those gatherings that particularly resonated with them. I also invited students to articulate things they observed in the faith practices of others and wished were a part of Hindu practice, and I did the same. The exercise turned into a full-on brainstorming session, and the students—Vijay included—seemed engaged. By the time we finished, we had the first draft of blueprints for a new weekly gathering.

I believe that this episode makes a powerful statement about the difference between the "room" and the "view" approaches to accommodation. A Christian colleague likens this difference to the distinction between handing a traveler with a map and equipping him with the services of a trekking guide.[5] The map is *informative*; it helps the traveler to identify his destination and chart a route to get there, but only in the most theoretical of senses. It is static and unchanging, conveying information in a unidirectional and one-dimensional way. Maps lack the ability to respond to challenges or changes in terrain as they occur. Trekking guides, on the other hand, are also sources of information—but are, at heart, *relational*. Because they have traversed the same trails already, they are able to draw from experience to help the traveler. Moreover, they are also companions on the journey—interacting with the traveler and helping him to negotiate changes in terrain or unforeseen challenges in "real time." The efficacy of guides depends on their ability to maintain open lines of two-way communication with travelers and their flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances.

In fact, this is what played out with Vijay and his classmates. They had been handed a map and told to get themselves from point A to point B, but the map could not possibly have predicted the pitfalls that would await them, or help them to re-orient themselves once they drifted off-course. When these seemingly rudderless, lost students had the opportunity to engage relationally with a guide, not only did they prove themselves capable travelers—they also turned out to be cartographers.

From the Kiddie Table to the Common Table

Another significant difference between the two approaches is in how they either reinforce or dismantle the majority/minority dynamics and cultural hegemony operating on campus. This becomes apparent, and particularly problematic, when applied to accommodating faith-based dietary practices.

Every year, on the Monday preceding Thanksgiving, Princeton hosts an interfaith dinner dedicated to the theme of gratitude. From the beginning, the organizers set an all-vegetarian menu for the dinner; their intention was to create a "common table" where all students could eat the same meal (since nonvegetarian students of various faiths can generally eat vegetarian food, while the converse is not true). The centerpiece

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[5] I am indebted to my colleague and friend Rev. Tara Woodard-Lehman for this analysis.

of the meal, served with a healthy dose of good humor and playfulness, was a "faux turkey" made of tofu (more colloquially referred to as *tofurkey*). Last year, however, a new administrator took over the organizing of the dinner and decided to change the menu to also include nonvegetarian fare, including a real turkey, in order to reflect "a more traditional Thanksgiving meal" in the spirit of the holiday. To accommodate the vegetarians, certainly a numerically smaller group than the turkey-eaters, organizers also offered a tofurkey as "the vegetarian option."

Setting aside the specific arguments presented by each side in this particular case, or polemics around vegetarianism generally, this episode gives us valuable insight into how students *perceive* and *feel about* how their religious practices are accommodated. Several students I spoke to voiced their disappointment at the change, specifically citing the absence of a common table. One student, who declined to attend because of the change, spoke about the event as "yet another reminder that I am 'that kid with the weird diet'" and rhetorically asked, "don't I get enough of that throughout the year?" Students who did attend echoed this discomfort, often using the word "awkward" to describe the experience. In one case, a student confided that she was more disturbed by the principle than the practical choice of what to eat: "I usually end up [just] eating side dishes anyway," she said. "But I think it was sad that it [the dinner] ended up being this divisive thing when the whole point was supposed to be come together as one community" (personal communication with students, November 2012).

These responses, and others like them, are telling. In almost all the comments relayed to me, students complained that the dinner was a part of (and, arguably, a reinforcement of) a pattern of ostracizing or segregating them because of their dietary practice. More than one student expressed concern about the public nature of the accommodation; although none of them made a secret of their vegetarianism, they also felt uncomfortable about being "singled out" for it.[6]

Discomfort at being singled out would be a concern for any student with a dietary restriction or preference; it is particularly problematic, however, for Hindu students, who already struggle with "the consciousness of being the amorphous, subordinate, other" (Thapar, 2001, p. 63). Even as these students' religious needs are being accommodated, they are reminded that these needs are deviations from the mainstream, and feel marked as "abnormal" or "weird." Students who attended the event reported encountering language to this effect—being asked, for instance, whether they were eating the vegetarian option or the *normal* meal. Even when done in the spirit of accommodating the Hindu students' needs and with good intention, this mentality evinces the same paternalism I discussed earlier, and reinforces Christian normativity. As a result, students who are already cast as "the other" because of their religious practices are made subject to a process of "double-marginalization"—once in regards to their practice, and a second time in the way in which that practice is accommodated. One student summed this up well, evoking a familiar Thanksgiving image to make her point: "It felt like I was being forced to sit at the kiddie table."

This episode continues to stir up debate and discussion; it is unclear whether next year's gathering will follow the new model or revert to the common table ethos of its founding. In any case, the example illustrates that while the "room" approach concerns itself only with providing students with an option, the "view" approach offers accommodation in a deeper sense—it seeks to give these "doubly marginalized" students the opportunity to advocate for a truly common table.

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[6] It is significant that none of the students expressed concern over a shortage of available vegetarian options, a fear of cross-contamination, or feeling offended by the sight or smell of meat—all common and valid concerns for vegetarian students to have. I feel that this simply underscores that the issue here had to do with feeling ostracized.

From Tolerance to Engagement

Thus far, we have seen how the move from a "room" approach to a "view" approach can help bring about a shift from impersonal, static, and even inequitable modes of accommodation to relational, dynamic, fluid, and empowering ones. I would suggest that this shift is an indication that the long cherished ideal of tolerance may be giving way to true engagement.

What is wrong with tolerance? In his argument that Christians seeking meaningful exchange with non-Christians should adopt a model of hospitality instead of tolerance, theologian and scholar Luke Bretherton defines *tolerance* as "the willingness to accept differences of which, at whatever level, one might as an individual or as a community, disapprove" (2006, p. 122).

Tolerance thus implicitly rests upon an asymmetrical subject-object relationship. *We* tolerate *the other*, a being described only in contraindication to us. Moreover, according to this definition, tolerance is based on viewing the other judgmentally and from a place of privilege. It is almost always a member of the majority (the hegemon) who tolerates the minority (the aberration from the norm); rarely, if ever, do we speak of tolerance flowing the other way.

Bretherton's analysis may strike us as unnecessarily pessimistic. In our postmodern age of sacrosanct pluralism, few administrators—what to speak of professionals involved in religious life—would wish to be quoted as "disapproving" of the religious practices of another. And yet, if we are honest, we may recognize this sense of disapproval lying uncomfortably beneath the surface and between the lines. We have already seen, for instance, that the "room" approach can reinforce the idea that the practice requiring accommodation is a departure from that which is normal. It is hardly a leap to go from *abnormal* to *worthy of disapproval*.

The experience of Amit and Radha, a Hindu couple seeking to hold their wedding in the Princeton University chapel, illustrates the tension between tolerance and true engagement rather well. The chapel is a highly desired wedding venue, with strict policies governing who can marry there—only students, alumni, current staff or faculty of the university, or children of any of these categories, are eligible. Couples must demonstrate their ties to the university and articulate why they wish to be married in the chapel, and must provide a primary and alternate date for the ceremony; it is not unusual for couples to change their own scheduled dates to match the availability of the chapel ("Weddings in the Chapel," n.d.). Amit and Radha, both recent alumni of Princeton, were thus overjoyed when their preferred date was available and their application was accepted. However their initial delight quickly turned to anxiety when it came time to discussing the details of the ceremony and their religious needs. It soon became clear that the chapel's strict and explicit policies—covering things like acceptable use of flowers and candles, protocol for music, and austere limitations on time allotted for preparation—were completely at odds with some of the most basic elements of a Hindu wedding ceremony.

As anyone who has planned a wedding can attest, negotiating with a venue over its policies is often par for the course—stressful, perhaps, but not at all uncommon. Most couples must sacrifice some aspect of their "dream weddings" in light of the pragmatic realities of the venue. For Amit and Radha, however, the policies appeared to threaten the very possibility of holding a Hindu ceremony at all. For instance, even the simplest Hindu ceremony calls for a canopy to be erected, and the use of loose flowers (which have important symbolic importance) and flower petals for ceremonial offerings; the chapel's policy allows only for only "two floral arrangements . . . in the front of the sanctuary" and prohibits any structure that is "taller than five feet off the ground and two feet in diameter at the widest point of display" ("Weddings in the Chapel," n.d.). Hindu weddings involve traditional Indian music and the singing of ritual specific prayers; the chapel policy prohibits couples from arranging for guest musicians or singers and specifies that "all music

[be] arranged under the direction of . . . [the] university organist, whose authority is final" or by "a number of excellent singers and instrumentalists . . . booked through the university organist" ("Weddings in the Chapel"). Perhaps most problematically, the chapel policy prohibits the use of any flame beyond two standing candles and a unity candle, and states that "nothing [e.g. rice, flower petals] may be thrown…before, during, or after the ceremony"; the essential feature of a Hindu wedding ceremony—indeed, the core of the whole ceremony according to many Hindus—is the lighting of a fire and ritual offering of rice grains and flower petals into the fire ("Weddings in the Chapel").

Not surprisingly, a number of Hindus who have looked into the chapel as a possible wedding venue have been "scared off" by these policies. One alumnus told me that he realized that trying to make his Hindu ceremony work in the chapel "would be like fitting a square peg into a round hole" and that "it wasn't worth the hassle" (personal communication with alumnus, September 2012). An alumna, who initially considered the chapel but then opted to have the Hindu part of her interfaith wedding in the ballroom of a nearby hotel instead, was even more blunt in her assessment: "I think you can either have a Hindu wedding or a ceremony in the chapel, but not both at the same time" (personal communication with alumna, September 2012). In fact, this is precisely the challenge Radha and Amit faced; at one point, a well-meaning but pessimistic university employee told them that "the chapel may not be the place for you" and encouraged them to consider alternatives off-campus.

I would suggest that this paradox is emblematic of the tolerance model. Ostensibly, religious practice has no bearing on eligibility to be married in the chapel, a multifaith venue that is described as "a place of grace and peace . . . open to all people" ("Weddings in the Chapel," n.d.). And yet, in practice, the policies often effectively communicate that the chapel is "not the place for" non-Christian couples. These policies are based on assumptions about what constitutes a "normal" wedding in that space. Aberrations from this ideal—"strange" rituals that utilize fire or flowers or music in ways that the majority disapproves of or fears will disrupt the chapel's ambiance—might be tolerated and even accommodated, but only to a limit.

Fortunately, Amit and Radha persisted in their efforts and connected with a chapel coordinator who, unlike the employee quoted earlier, expressed a willingness to work with them to overcome the challenges posed by the policies. She reached out to the Hindu Life Program and invited me to be a partner in dialogue and an educational resource. The result was a series of meetings in which the couple, the chapel coordinator, and I explored how we could honor the intent behind the chapel's policies without sacrificing the essential practices of the Hindu ceremony. Most importantly, perhaps, we discussed how the policies could be reconsidered to be broader in the future and how we might attempt to chip away at the biased assumptions underlying them. In other words, we engaged with one another as equals and worked together to accommodate religious practice. As of this writing, Amit and Radha are looking forward to their wedding—with a slightly simplified but authentic Hindu ceremony—in the chapel later this year.

As this example demonstrates, tolerance might adopt the rhetoric of inclusion, but it is far too often a maintaining of the status quo. Even when an accommodation is carved out, it is—to utilize an idiom—"the exception that proves the rule." Engagement, on the other hand, allows us to critically examine, and periodically rewrite, the rulebook itself.

Conclusion: A Room With a View

In this article, I have attempted to share a glimpse into the challenge presented by Hindu practice on college campuses, and what this might tell us about accommodating the religious practice of minority or diasporic

communities generally. "The phenomenon of Hinduism in diaspora" offers those of us concerned about the accommodation of religious practice in America "unique, almost laboratory-like situations for analyzing the impact of varying conditions on processes of retention and change" (Vertovec, 2001, p. 288). I believe that chaplaincy is the most effective and meaningful way to engage with the retention/change tension and accommodate Hindu practice on campuses. I realize, however, that Hindu chaplaincy raises its own problems, and I would be remiss not to briefly acknowledge a few of these.

First, one may argue that the notion of a Hindu chaplain is, on its face, an ahistoric anomaly and represents precisely the type of "Christian-like congregationalization" of Hinduism I argued against in an earlier section of this article. Indeed, I am aware that "chaplain" and "pastor" are borrowed concepts that find no real corollaries in traditional definitions of Hindu leadership. While I certainly do not think that this is reason enough to dismiss the idea of Hindu chaplains, I admit that it may limit the extent to which these chaplains are supported and accepted within more orthodox pockets of the Hindu world. For Hindu chaplaincy to be recognized as authentic and take hold, it will be necessary to begin to identify sources of pastoral authority from within the tradition. This would also help to lay the foundation for the creation of appropriate training, accreditation, and oversight mechanisms for Hindu chaplains—all of which are arguably crucial and yet nonexistent right now.

Second, I agree that the efficacy of a chaplain is largely dependent on *who* is hired or appointed to serve as the chaplain. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to do so thoroughly here, I would argue that a college campus is best served by engaging with a chaplain as a hired (and salaried) employee of the institution, who is explicitly tasked with serving the needs of the broad Hindu community and owes his or her allegiance to the institution as opposed to an off-campus entity. Since such a model requires the college or university to invest substantial resources (i.e., a salary, a means of hiring and supervision), it is hardly surprising that it is still rarely pursued; as of this writing, Princeton remains the only American university to staff a full-time Hindu chaplain, with a small handful of peer institutions having followed suit by hiring a Hindu chaplain to serve on a part-time basis. Other colleges and universities have chosen the less hands-on (and more affordable) model of deputizing volunteer Hindu chaplains from local Hindu temples and sectarian organizations, who are recognized as affiliates of the institution but left to carry out their activities autonomously. However well intentioned this may be, it may also prove problematic. These "chaplains" often dedicate the bulk of their energy to evangelizing on behalf of a particular sectarian view or increasing their flocks. In other words, colleges who hope for Hindu ministers may find themselves with Hindu missionaries instead. [7]

Finally, I must acknowledge that there is a danger in over-emphasizing the role of the chaplain at the expense of the symbolic and literal value of space and time. Designated space, such as a Hindu prayer room, has immense value beyond the direct use of the room for ritual worship. Including holidays like Diwali on the academic calendar impacts students in a way that transcends the immediate function of excusing them from assignments on that day. A sign that marks a prayer room as "belonging to" Hindu students, or a printed calendar that lists Hindu holidays alongside "mainstream" Christian and Jewish religious holidays can be powerful; they are explicit, palpable symbols affirming the community's legitimacy. While I have argued—perhaps, even forcefully argued—for chaplaincy, I do not mean to suggest that a college use the

[7] Not surprisingly, the organizations that seem to be most active with volunteer chaplaincy—for instance, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), the Vedanta Society, and the Art of Living Foundation—all tend to be both highly sectarian and outreach-oriented.

hiring of a chaplain as a way of excusing itself from providing this type of affirmation in these ways. Instead, I would suggest that empowering a chaplain to serve a community should be seen as part of a larger process of accommodation; the chaplain should be seen as a partner in the process, not a replacement for it. Indeed, what is needed is the integration of the two approaches—a room *with* a view, as it were.

I am reminded of this need every year in the fall, when the Hindu Life Program hosts our largest celebration of the year, Diwali at the Chapel. The event draws almost one thousand students, faculty, staff, and members of the wider community to the beautiful university chapel—which is enhanced that evening by traditional Indian décor and a Hindu altar—for an *arati* ceremony, devotional music, classical and folk Indian dance, and narrations apropos to the occasion. I have the opportunity to give a talk from one of the chapel's stately lecterns. Each year as I climb the wooden steps leading up to the podium, I am invariably humbled by the realization that this special evening is possible because of the university's wisdom, courage, and hospitality—both in re-visioning the chapel as a multifaith space open to all, and in giving me the opportunity to answer that invitation. The lectern affords a magnificent view, and in gazing out across this very special room, I feel that I am allowed a glimpse into a very promising future.

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