

The first step of my research process was, of course, deciding on a topic. The given theme was an analysis of monsters and a corresponding social theory. Maybe vampires? No, vampires were too boring and repetitive. Werewolves? No, my Twilight era was something I wanted to leave in the past. I kept racking my brain until it hit me. Hindu mythology! It was a theme I was familiar with yet had never really explored the deeper semantics of. I now had a monster, or rather a group of monsters, and just needed to find a social theory. This part wasn't too difficult considering the influence of the caste system and its consequent social issues. Perfect. Since I now had both my monster and a social theory, I got started on my research.

I simply started with a broad Google search: "hindu mythology and the caste system." I wanted to see what had already been done and how they approached it, as well as a sort of guide for what direction I could take my paper in. I had expected it to be a somewhat popular topic considering the strong connections between the two, but it was a lot less directly researched than I had thought. I took this as my sign to narrow down the Hindu mythology portion of my topic to something more specific, like the Ramayana. The Ramayana had characters varying from the highest castes, such as kings and sages, to those of lower castes, such as demons.

After this first specification in the direction of my research, it was time to begin gathering sources. I first found the chapter and passage I wanted to use as the framework of the mythology portion of the paper. I found a credible translation of the Ramayana from Sanskrit to English and tried to find the passage that would be able to concisely convey my thesis. However, this wasn't as easy as I thought it would be. The Ramayana contains over seven different 'books' with over five hundred chapters. There was no way I would be able to read all of them. This is when my prior knowledge from Sunday School came in handy. I racked my brain for impactful stories from the Ramayana that could capture the discrimination between demons and gods when the

story of Surpanakha came to mind. She was a demoness whom I pictured to be dark-skinned but could not recall when I had ever read so. This was a point I could target in my paper, making it a perfect example. I then filtered through the few chapters that covered her story and found the quote that I believed portrayed the manipulation of scriptural texts best.

The rest of my research, and the most difficult part for me, was finding evidence to match my experiences. As an Indian American, the prejudices I was trying to analyze were ones that I also uncovered in myself through the process. I started to recognize that the version of Hindu mythology I imagined was inaccurate and negatively affected the way I approached my culture. Although this recognition occurred, I had to find evidence for it. I had to find evidence to prove that this color-based discrimination was prevalent and how it affected people of lower caste, especially from credible sources. This is when Google Scholar came in handy. I first began with a broad search similar to those before, and searched for the keywords: “effect of Hinduism on caste.” I looked for anything that would be relevant to my paper, and when I did find something that was similar but not exactly what I wanted, I would rewrite my input to the search engine but this time with a more specific keyword in mind that I had found from my previous search. In this way, I narrowed down my broad search to something specific like: “correlation hindu comics and caste” and found the journal by Radhika Parameswaran and Kavitha Cardoza that I used in my paper. In other times when narrowing down my searches didn’t prove to be effective, I first found research similar to what I was looking for and went through their sources to find one that I would be able to utilize in my own, and went through and annotated the portions that would prove to be effective.

When I was researching visual portrayals of Hindu mythology, the first thing I did was look for a reputable artist. I then found an early 20th-century artist known as Raja Ravi Varma.

He was famous for his puranic art and his series that depicted the Ramayana. I had planned to analyze the juxtaposition of two of his most famous pieces detailing the hero and villain of the myth, but was unfortunately unable to due to the page requirement for this assignment,

The largest takeaway from this paper that I had from this paper was how to patch together the different voices from my sources into my own and keep the reader focused on my message.

The authors of the sources I had gathered had diverse backgrounds and goals that shone through in their theses and research, but I needed to shift the focus to my thesis. I did so by paraphrasing their work while trying to maintain its integrity of it. Through this project, I learned to bring out my voice as a writer with greater depth and volume.