

Agamic South Indian Temples: should they be preserved or destroyed?

Aunt:

[daughter] and I were blessed to attend this concert in the VERY HOLY ambience of the Navaratri Mandapam of Sri Padmanabha Swamy temple yesterday. Actually it is a two and a half hour kutcheri. No electric lights, only the big Kerala kutthuvilakkus in plenty. Mike was there. No chairs. Only we have to sit down, irrespective of your age /position in life! Only Dhotisangavastram. Sarees/Kerala Mundus. Available for hire also if you don't have to help the tourists. And you can not come out in between. And if we can't sit down we can sit in the Praharams where we can sit in a raised level, comfortable, putting our legs down, just like a chair with sky as our roof! Wonderful Divine atmosphere! And the peak of it is the Singer has to face the Ambal and sing! No announcement, no hand clippings, perfect silence. Naturally the artist also is inspired to sing for Ambal Saraswati. And This Saraswati Vignanam is brought from Padmanabha Puram, where it is worshipped through out the year. This is Moolavar Vignanam. Only for Navaratri Ambal comes here on an elephant with all paraphornilia. And there the Vilakku is worshipped on these days till Ambal goes back there. After the concert Arati is performed. And the best of it is That this Ambal is the Ambal worshipped by KAMBAR who handed over it to Chera king during his last days. Only AIR telecasts this after the concert, the very same day. They have given only a part of it. All Swathi Thirunal songs only. And every day one Ragam for Main piece. God bless us all

Myself to my group:

I got this message from my atthai. As I replied: "Wow. I am amazed at this description. Thanks. (But, reading second time I realized this is Kerala and not Chennai PB temple! That makes more sense.)"

Makes more sense in that it would not make sense in Chennai today, such a requirement based on dharma, tradition and propriety. ~ "It is the Deity's House, not your picnic spot. Follow His/Her rules." Some major Kerala temple institutions and their Hindus seem to have full clarity here. Hope they stay strong.

Friend (private response):

And yet Kerala is the most gone case of all Indian states.

Me:

Yes, I started off writing "I don't know how quite to make sense: communist govt, PFI terrorism, Hindus almost minority....", then changed to something more basic since readers are mainly TN based. You would be in a better position to explain the apparent dichotomy of this temple scene with the social and political realities there.

[Here it begins]

Friend:

There is no dichotomy. Hinduism is the strongest in the Bimaru states where the traditional high culture died out long ago. The high culture survived in the south, and Hinduism is weak in the south. The traditionalist Vajrayana buddhist high culture was very strong in Tibet, and I am not sure Tibet has been doing well. Tantra blossomed in Kashmir in pre-medieval India, and Kashmir went to dogs (but not before exporting its brand of Hinduism to the south, unfortunately). Bengal has had a lot of Hindu tantra, and has been going to the dogs as well.

I am curious as to why this is. Very speculatively, the Agama/tantra system of temple worship may be dangerous. It is full of very complicated rules, and they keep shouting that flouting this or that will ruin the king and the country. I am sure such rules get flouted all the time. So the correct option might have been to shift to Bimaru-style worship instead of Agamic/tAntric worship in temples, which is full of dangers (if you believe the texts themselves!).

Continuing on the speculation, tantra might have started out as a very complicated and esoteric system of practices for individual sAdhaka-s who can navigate risks, and achieve siddhi-s etc. for themselves. However institutionalizing that sort of a thing -- instituting them in temples and having traditional priests in them, without worrying about whether the progeny, even if sincere, really possesses the kind of spiritual calibre to navigate such risks -- may have been a recipe for disaster.

Me:

I don't know about tantra based temples. Its funny; North Indian Hindus often comment positively on the strength of Hinduism in the south and in particular of South Indian temples, whereas South Indians like missionaries use the

weakening of Hinduism due to all sorts of factors, to attack whatever is still holding tall and unbending to such external pressures.

The better option instead of speculating would be to enable the society to call for both options separately rather than stifle "high-culture" in the name of opening up for bimaruru style. Not all temples need to operate like PB or Guruvayoor; but having them is like the pillars that hold up the construction.

Friend:

The Agamas and the tantras all came from the Indian tantric developments of the first ten centuries AD, as far as I know. The south Indian pUjA-paddhati-s all subscribe to this or that Agama or tantra: the Iyengars to Pancharatra or Vaikhanasa Agamic texts, the Shaivites to the Shaiva Siddhantic Agama texts like the Kamikagama, the Namboothiris to texts of Kerala tantra like the Tantra Samuchchaya etc.

What is PB? Anyway, I don't think of these temples as holding up the pillars any more than Bimaruru temples.

I might change my view if you can produce enough examples of people who made concrete spiritual advances only because of the atmosphere provided by this or that temple. I would expect that the number of examples you have is zero. The temples are not even designed for spiritual progress, that is how bad they are.

Me:

PB is the Padmanabha Swamy temple; I was referring to what my atthai said of her visit. She certainly was inspired by the atmosphere, call her brahmin if you wish. Narayana Bhattathiri wrote on Narayaneeyam sitting in the Guruvayoor temple. It could have been any Krishna anywhere but it was Krishna there in that temple that became his ishtadevata. Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavathar also wept to Krishna in that temple when his voice went and he considered it the Lord's blessing that he got the voice back (as per the tidbits I read/heard). Papanasam Sivan also wrote songs addressed to the deities of the Kapali temple; you may not think it "concrete" spiritual advance but for him the deity is real and the temple atmosphere would most likely be important. Likewise Sri Ramanuja with temple in Sri Ranganam. That temple culture with rules and regulations provides the atmosphere for whole sects of Hinduism who are not interested in replacing it with bimaruru style. You want them all to vanish so you a non-practicing non-temple dude can imagine and speculate about what is

problem with Hinduism. Its certainly not the temple traditions and there are 1000s of devotees who are thronging to them to benefit from that atmosphere. There is no way to say that one can just remove the atmosphere and replace it bimaruru or north indian, and that people will or will not obtain the same inspiration. It becomes a different experience. In a different setting and or different temple, a different style of worship may work for the people there. But the South Indian traditional style is there because it does aid in the spiritual progress of the devotees.

Friend:

Wrong. I would have no problem if the temples would not cause harm. If it is "take it and benefit or at worst waste your time", I would have no problem. The problem is these things are threatening, not that they don't offer me something I would have wanted.

But the tantra thing is set up so that mistakes invite harm. And the whole damn thing is set up so as to be so complicated that mistakes are unavoidable. Example: I heard recently of a story where someone asked a relative to not inform him of a particular death, because that would prevent him from going to work (i.e., priestly work) for a few days, and deprive him of income. Someone else told me that Tirupati was not supposed to be open all day, but the Government made it all day so they could get more revenue.

So it is a weird situation. On one hand complicated rules being insisted on (as is common for tantra), while you have a lot of people who don't think twice about flouting them. If you don't think this is a recipe for disaster, it means you don't believe in the authority of the texts yourself (like the priest mentioned above).

Why can't we have a set-up where those spiritually inclined can make spiritual progress, others will at worst waste their time? But no, traditionalists want people to be in danger so they can continue with their rule of fear.

And I don't understand what gives you the confidence that the temples you go to, have their regular duties done with the kind of perfection that will make the temples beneficial on the whole, as opposed to damaging. Narayana Bhattatthiri etc. - I don't see any story of spiritual striving and advancement there. All those stories are just stupid miracles or something of the sort, no inspiring story where someone is able to get better control of mind after going to temple. They don't even have space to sit and meditate.

Me:

My goodness. His mind was absorbed in contemplation of the bhagavatham and the lilas of the Lord. That is how you attain chitta-ekagratha, via bhakti. Sure his own ailment was the preceding reason, but it becomes channel to contemplating on the Lord all the more and Bhattathiri wrote out his composition. You can disbelieve him or call it miracle/stupid but he records his his attaining vision of Krishna.

[NOTE: I have not quite answered whether this Bhakti can be attributed particularly to the agamic operation and atmosphere of such a temple.]

See, that human beings err or act corruptly is nothing to wonder about. It can happen in SI or in bimarus. It is part of the karma-karmaphala cycle. You either believe it or you don't. You get what you deserve only. If you are in a temple where there are such rules and it is your dharma to follow them, AND you don't, then you get your reward accordingly in this or a future life. And if I am experiencing something that I imagine is because of your mistake, then WRONG: I experience what is aligned to my karma only - you only serve as a catalyst for what I have to undergo. The right response then is for me to work to adhere to my svadharma given the circumstances and whatever phalas I have to face, and my right decision may include trying to rectify the human failures. If the priest is not doing his duty and I know of it, then it may be my responsibility to intervene and make sure the priest does his duty. (report to the authorities etc.) It is not "Oh the priest is not doing his duty. Problem is the complications of the shastras. Let's get rid of the whole thing."

Friend:

1. Let us agree to disagree on whether there is any spiritual content in Narayaneeyam at all. As far as I am concerned, people liked the fact that they had a handy summary of Bhagavatam, and it was written in good Sanskrit, which some might even call great Sanskrit.

2. But that is beside the point. Look, you can't have a nuclear installation every one kilometer, which needs such superhuman levels of care that 75% of those who use it can be expected to not manage to ensure the safety of, and then insist that we should keep with those and it is only the fault of the 75%. These systems are made for humans, and if humans can't be trusted to use them well, the system has to be junked.

2'. In fact, the western world had some controversy when electrical lines started to be laid (there were bitter wars between Edison and Westinghouse), because here and there a shock took the life of someone, sometimes in a very grotesque way. Thank God the westerners were reasonable human beings unlike our traditionalists, and eventually designed the lines and devices so that the probability of death is really really low. Our traditionalists would instead have insisted on shock-prone lines and said that it was the duty of the people living in the society to exercise care.

3. Historically, Hinduism had follower-ship on a platter. Caste-membership was the only way one could get social security, and it is difficult to convert an entire caste (as far as I know, most conversions out of Hinduism involved conversions of entire castes). So Hinduism never had to work hard to appeal to the people. This is why people like you feel entitled to simply fight for the system and not expect the system to have any sense of responsibility to the masses: the system never had to fight for it, and you assume that that should be true in the modern world too. But in my view people come before systems. The systems are for people. It is inhuman to sacrifice people for systems, even indirectly insofar as creating conditions that could lead the unsuspecting person to trouble is concerned.

I can even live with it if the system is useless at worst if handled without care, but once it becomes dangerous, the game changes.

4. Let us get back to tantra, on which all these rituals are based. Suppose I want to do a sAdhana of Amriteshvara or Vajrakubjika or a Buddhist deity like Akashagarbha or Chakrasamvara. Before the world of the internet, I would find it difficult to even find a teacher who could teach it. If I could find such a teacher, the teacher might reject me saying that the sAdhana could be dangerous for me since my mind is not matured enough (e.g., what if it gives me siddhi-s, and one of the siddhi-related dangerous scenarios narrated/parable-ized by Sri Ramakrishna plays out?).

So tantra rightly started out as a path meant for select practitioners of high ability. Am I to trust blindly that all the priests today have that sort of ability? I am sure that is not the case because otherwise we wouldn't have some dishonest priests like the example I mentioned in my previous email. I mean, I believe that many if not most priests are sincere and even capable, but to say that all of them necessarily have the high level sufficient to avert disaster, needs further assurances from someone who has enough divine powers to verify it for themselves. The ball is in your (not P., but traditionalists per se) court.

4'. You say that I should report the dishonest priest. But the point is that, if there is something that I can detect, there is probably a lot that I cannot detect.

5. What is one thing that I think should urgently be done? I think there should be better communication. Why did people accept the DMK Government's dictats on temple priests even though your friends Deepa Duraiswamy and Kulithalai Ramalingam warned us of its dangers? Clearly there was miscommunication:

(a) while the priests believed, or were given to believe, that it was the complicated ritual set up and rigorous discipline in the temples,

(b) the average person clearly believed that it was just the particular deity in the particular temple being very powerful.

The traditionalists were happy to "blackbox" the details and even play along with "wrong" models in the minds of the people, and perhaps intentionally so -- things were working well, and they did not want to disrupt the game.

So there is an urgent necessity to answer a few questions. Most importantly, what are the benefits and dangers? If it is going to put me in danger, I deserve better information, and a say in the decision on whether the whole thing should be allowed. For instance, here are subquestions of this question:

(a) Why is classical tantric sadhana so private in the interest of security, but public temple worship is not only okay but also ****failsafe**** (if it is)?

(b) What all do I stand to miss if we shift enmasse to Bimaru worship patterns? Does the difference justify the dangers?

(c) If some rival of mine goes to the temple and prays to bump me off, is that going to be even partially answered? Kerala temples have shatru-samhAram, which I am told involves praying against the continuation of someone's progeny and children.

(d) If this has anything to do with spiritual sAdhana, why is it that the temple does not give me a space to sit and meditate?

(e) When I go to a place like Tirupati, hooliganish devotees push me around, and in fact when I went in 2019 (the only time I went), I was suffering from a bad headache and some frustration related to the token system, and I too pushed around, at one point quite intentionally. I was in a totally foul mood through much of the visit, and that was several hours. At what point of frustration does such a visit become a net negative?

(f) Look at Christianity and Islam. They have their beliefs/superstitions depending on how you want to see them, they have their blasphemy rules and so on. But the set of rules is kind of limited in number, doesn't change too much from region to region, and simple. You can't draw the one who cannot be drawn, but it is not like using your index finger instead of ring finger will make a deity angry, or that you have to think of a deity as a person and feed the deity even if you are in bad shape. So there are many more restrictions in Hinduism, and their boundaries are not always clear, and you run the risk of offending without meaning it.

Given that our religion is less forgiving, and imposing of more suffering, what do we gain by staying in it?

In fact, thinking of this, one realizes that the Hindu scriptures mostly don't attack someone who leaves Hinduism for another religion. The bullying of traditional Hinduism is all reserved for those who care for it. With the Abrahamic religions, at least the ones other than Judaism, it is the opposite: they bully those who don't belong to them, but are relatively lenient on those who belong to them provided a few simple rules of propriety are observed.

Notice this pathology: traditional Hinduism doesn't want me or care for me. It simply says that if I want it, it will put me through a lot of humiliation and constraints. So why should I want it?

Me:

Before I attempt to answer, I need to have some idea that you are complaining about things I too am familiar with.

When I think of temple, I am thinking Kesava Perumal or Kapaleeshwarar temple, or Sri Rangam, Tirupathi, and to a lesser extent your Kerala Padmanabha Swamy or Gurvayur temples.

I am not thinking Tantric sadhanas by or with the help of priests as being the essential feature of these temples or their worship of deities. If you are putting the daily rule-based devotions to the moorthy by the priests, or the archanai that they do on our behalf, as being "tantra", then I can try to figure out what exactly is your major concern and the basis for it with regard to these rituals. This is the extent of the general devotees experience in a temple. They go there for having darshanam of the deity, to pray, to do archanai or supplication to the deities for their benefit, on special occasions or for special purposes; and otherwise having

gone to that abode of God, they return home happy hopefully (with exceptions like you in Tirupathi).

If this is the realm of your tantra complaints, I am with you in that it is the same realm of my temple conception. The agama shastras teach about how the temple should be built, maintained and worship of the deities conducted including for the sake of the devotees.

If by tantra you mean more esoteric specialized worship, then I am not going to have much idea unless you give very specific examples in the context of these types of temples (or preferably a specific temple from above list, for example) and develop your analysis based on a "tantric sadhana" essential to such a temple that you feel is potentially dangerous etc. Otherwise the only emphasis on "tantra" that I can recollect is from the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna where all sorts of such practices get mentioned including vama-chara, sitting on dead corpses, etc. Such may be a big thing back home in Kerala for you but it is oblivious to me and irrelevant to the question of doing away with all agama based temple worship for bimaruru replacement. Address something specific to say a Perumal temple in TN, that you think is dangerous and therefore worth replacing with bimaruru.

And just to be clear, what exactly is bimaruru worship that you mean? Is Puri Jagannath Bimaruru? (Not statewise but style wise). I just assumed you meant things like devotees can themselves go and touch the deity; there is a lack of strictness of formal worship found in South Indian temples.

Ok, leaving those doubts, let me just assume that by tantra, you just mean the daily rules of worship of the deity by the priest of the temple. Like you should bathe and adorn Him with these materials, in such and such order, saying such and such mantras. If you don't do it like this, then this or that calamity will happen. Ok then, we have to find an example of this "calamity" that will follow, so we avoid speculating too much. But it is plausible. The temple has been consecrated, prana-pratishta of the deity is done. So the people are expected to follow the necessary shastras and fulfill their dharma to the deity who will correspondingly be the source of welfare for the general community of worshippers. That is presumably a pact we make if it is assumed we have asked the deity to reside in the temple, and even otherwise we have certain duties to the devathas and shastras will tell (for instance the brahmins) to do this or that for such a purpose. The shastras tell us what our dharmas are. If we fail to follow them or follow adharma, then there are consequences for the failure.

Let's take the worst case analogy. The tirupathi temple is a nuclear reactor. The Deity Plutonium-Venkateswara had come there and is being offered daily worship. You are afraid that if the worship is not done properly, there may be an explosion and leakage. If you believe it and think bimaruru is the way out, then first thing to do is find the shastra that confirms a way to change an agama-temple to a bimaruru temple or that allows the ending of an agama temple. If no shastra tells you that the deity can be annulled in the way you want it to happen, then we have a problem already. The consequence may be further disaster anyway should we do such a thing. What we do know is the rules of how it must be maintained for the benefit of one and all. And the stumbling block is not really the difficulty of being the priest and conducting such worship. The job itself is not that impossible compared to the level of discipline and detail humans are capable of in other areas. There is simply the fear that in the climate where everything is corrupted and shraddha is lacking, the priests also will follow that route invoking adharmic consequence for all of society.

Like I said, if there is agamic means to annul the temple nuclear reactor, then there is an argument that for temples that cannot be thus maintained by Hindus, they should be changed to a more benign energy source. Don't expect nuclear power, but you also need not fear a nuclear disaster. Be happy. And if Hindus do want an extremely powerful Center like a Tirupathi or Kapaleeshwara or Padmanaba Swamy, then make sure the whole thing from priest to last person follow the agama rules to the letter. That becomes Dharma to the deity and to all humanity. It requires shraddha of course; but that kind of awareness was the basis of traditional strictness and my atthai's description of it in the PB temple is analogous to this requisite strictness.

All that said, still one has to defer the ball of this to the knowers of these shastras or to acharyas of the tradition. The above scenario makes Him appear like a robot who is going to punish one and all because the priest said a mantra incorrectly or put sandal paste in the wrong side. Whether such are the correct threats in the shastras for the mistakes (and I am talking specifically about the priest's worshipping or adorning the deity here, not some tantra from elsewhere), whether such is the correct interpretation of those threats to the last detail, etc. will have to be learned from the teachers of the tradition. Since certain emphases found with regard to certain actions and consequences can have non-literal meaning. "You will go to hell" may be less about you and hell than about the importance of following the rules; because as we get lackadaisical, the potential to obtain right results born out of disciplined agamic worship will also lessen. IN other words, when the agama shastras are not followed, the default may not be destruction and harm as much as the fallback of Bimaruru level of worship. The devotees already approach the deity only like a bimaruru devotee, barring some

differences; and the Deity is understood as receiving that devotee even for his personal worship and darshana. It is mainly their own devotional approach, individual to themselves, and the Deity is there for them. The priest failing to put the mark correctly or say the mantra correctly in an archana is not going to efface the devotee's individual supplication to the deity, as in any bimaru temple. At most, the priest's archana may not obtain its "extra" special results if he failed in his job. The bad consequence of his misdeed may at most fall on the priest or the temple caretakers who fail their duties knowingly or unknowingly having taken that post. That is their dharma, yes, to do that job correctly.

This would be the more sensible approach to understanding these texts - again the acharya of that temple tradition has to confirm. There are in Hindu scriptures "arthavada" statements that may over-emphasize for the sake of stressing importance but not to be taken literally. These could be in that category if priest bending pinky wrong way is said to cause death and destruction (if you can point to such extreme examples). It may be arthavada type or it may be an effect in that bad direction that is however a single stray in a hay bunch - net effect matters.

I will look at your points more specifically later, if there is something further to add.

Me:

5. What is one thing that I think should urgently be done? I think there should be better communication. Why did people accept the DMK Government's dictats on temple priests even though your friends Deepa Duraiswamy and Kulithalai Ramalingam warned us of its dangers? Clearly there was miscommunication:

- (a) while the priests believed, or were given to believe, that it was the complicated ritual set up and rigorous discipline in the temples,
- (b) the average person clearly believed that it was just the particular deity in the particular temple being very powerful.

I agree there. The public should be better informed of potential dangers in disrupting and changing the practices of an agamic or tantric temple. But the problem is that such communication cannot influence atheistic or other-religion people who are often controlling the narratives and the temples. Just because someone points to a shastra and says "Look. If you change this, then such a calamity will happen" doesn't mean people are going to believe. The "believers" are despised and disregarded by those in power, and it is an uphill battle to try

and generate mass-shraddha. Your thesis is there was never shraddha among the masses and it was only a minor brahmin gumbal. But that is a simplistic picture skewed by some generations of DMK-style brain-washing.

"The Vedic religion prospered in the past not only because of the patronage extended to the Brahmins by the Hindu rulers. People belonging to all varnas then were anxious that it should not become weak and perish. They saw too it that the Brahmin community did not weaken and contributed generously to its upkeep and to the nurturing of the Vedic tradition. Today you see hundreds of Vedic schools deserted. There are few Brahmin boys willing too study the scriptures. Who had raised the funds for the Vedic institutions? [In Tamil Nadu] the Nattukottai Nagarattars, Komutti Cettis and Vellalas. The work done by Nagarattars for our temples indeed remarkable. Throughout Tamil Nadu, if they built a temple they also built a Vedic school with the belief that the Vedas constituted the "root" of the temple. This root, they felt, was essential to the living presence of the deity in the temple and for the puja conducted there. Similarly, the big landowners among the Vellalas made lavish donations to the Vedic schools." <https://kamakoti.org/hindudharma/part3/chap6.htm>

Going by this opinion, the temple was not seen as only the deity+unnecessary paraphernalia. A more holistic picture of the temple in the context of varnashrama dharma was present in the minds of past Hindus of other varnas as well. The general Hindu saw that the maintenance of the Temple Order was essential and important; the atmosphere mattered.

Today that may all have degraded due to the propaganda machinery of rationalists and atheists and abrahamics. As a consequence, when temple is interfered with in the name of equality, people don't quite know how to respond. Ultimately the knowledge of how things ought to be and what will happen if they are not is a matter of shraddha and belief. Not everyone can be or need be trained in the shastras for this purpose. The brahmins were there for that and the general society would have trusted their guidance in such matters, had shraddha in the Dharma, and as in the acharya's quote, did their part to support that system. Not dissimilar from my writing about how a Hindu like myself goes to the temple to have darshana and do archana, and otherwise trust the pujari does his rituals correctly. The pujari himself thinks not in terms of "job" but in terms of unalienable svadharma of his life and immense responsibility to the deity: i.e. the

deity and its worship are "real" to him and he dare not violate the rules for his and others' welfare. That is the ideal way it is expected to work.

But such shraddha in the larger society can be undermined by systematic propaganda that dig at the faultlines. This is further exasperated when the brahmins themselves fall prey to desire etc. and lose their way. (The acharya talks on this in above link I have cited many times before.) So corruption within and without.

In the past 50 years, the public has also been mentally indoctrinated to the concept of Govt. control of Hindu temples. So, when govt takes such drastic decisions and acts like it has full right to do what it pleases, the masses submit without a great show of objection. It is like a circus lion being trained to think the master is more powerful and has control over it; when he raises his whip, the lion reflexively believes it has to bow down and submit. At least we are trying to make noises through the court now, saying the temple trustees have to take these decisions based on agama shastras and so on.

The traditionalists were happy to "blackbox" the details and even play along with "wrong" models in the minds of the people, and perhaps intentionally so -- things were working well, and they did not want to disrupt the game.

No game. It is not some clever plan hatched by brahmins. That is the outsider's view. From within, it is all about svadharma. And svadharma may not be "teach everyone everything." If the shastras tell that the brahmin should instruct everyone of everything and he does not, then the objection is valid. If they say he should not, then he should not. If they say neither and he chose to do not, then a case can be made that he could change and teach such things about his own "svadharma" including the nuances of temple worship. But sure, within that space of possibilities, the Hindus have to communicate in better manner of the traditional perspectives of whys and wherefores behind the rules of the religion.

So there is an urgent necessity to answer a few questions. Most importantly, what are the benefits and dangers? If it is going to put me in danger, I deserve better information, and a say in the decision on whether the whole thing should be allowed. For instance, here are subquestions of this question:

(a) Why is classical tantric sadhana so private in the interest of security, but public temple worship is not only okay but also ****failsafe**** (if it is)?

Classical tantra sadhana may have dangerous consequences in physical, mental and other planes if done incorrectly or by unfit people. It is walking on the razor's edge and if everyone takes up such things in the name of religion, it will likely become irreligion. Since you are risking a lot for getting possibly a lot, one wants to emphasize absolute discipline and precision lest we lose the focus on the goal and fall into the pits.

Public temple worship is not so dangerous if done slightly incorrectly: it is a medium of devotion. Your gain is bhakti and the Lord's blessing; the loss is His empathy and perhaps some negative karmaphala but not a Curse. That is all the inference you should build. It is not as hazardous to fail in the path of worship as in tantra.

(b) What all do I stand to miss if we shift enmasse to Bimaru worship patterns? Does the difference justify the dangers?

Your assumption of tantra-sadhana danger in public agamic worship is likely misplaced. I already gave you alternate possibility in my earlier mail. The failure in agamic worship, as far as the general devotee is concerned, is like the reduction to bimaru-level worship.

(c) If some rival of mine goes to the temple and prays to bump me off, is that going to be even partially answered? Kerala temples have shatru-samhAram, which I am told involves praying against the continuation of someone's progeny and children.

I already told how this is seen in the context of karma-karmaphala. Your rival cannot do a thing to you unless you already earned that result through your karma and it is befitting and perhaps beneficial to you to let go off some of that baggage through suffering etc. - in which case your rival is a catalyst for your experiencing necessary karmaphala. He is however responsible for his decision. If what he did is inherently adharmic for himself, then he will have accumulated new baggage. Like the rishis who curse someone, when they do it, they expend their own tapobalam; its not a free thing. The exception would be when it is actually your svadharma to do such an act of destruction; if you can perform it as svadharma with a mind of detachment and self-surrender, then instead of adding karma the action will become the means to attaining chitta-shuddhi.

(d) If this has anything to do with spiritual sAdhana, why is it that the temple does not give me a space to sit and meditate?

? You mean in Guruvayur you cannot sit and meditate somewhere? That cannot be generalized to all such temples. Certainly in Kapali or TN temples, you can sit somewhere and meditate! People do it as well. If certain temples have such "no meditate" rules based on their shastras, then that may be specific to their inner purpose. If it is just something superimposed by modern admin, then you have a case to make.

(e) When I go to a place like Tirupati, hooliganish devotees push me around, and in fact when I went in 2019 (the only time I went), I was suffering from a bad headache and some frustration related to the token system, and I too pushed around, at one point quite intentionally. I was in a totally foul mood through much of the visit, and that was several hours. At what point of frustration does such a visit become a net negative?

Focus on the purpose of your visit. The frustration becomes positive when you see the Lord. It is also a good experience to be among your fellow Hindus, push and shove be it, who are actually there for a good purpose. Or you should go with a different group of people and you can offset the difficulties of the experience in the midst of communicating with them.

(f) Look at Christianity and Islam. They have their beliefs/superstitions depending on how you want to see them, they have their blasphemy rules and so on. But the set of rules is kind of limited in number, doesn't change too much from region to region, and simple. You can't draw he who cannot be drawn, but it is not like using your index finger instead of ring finger will make a deity angry, or that you have to think of a deity as a person and feed the deity even if you are in bad shape. So there are many more restrictions in Hinduism, and their boundaries are not always clear, and you run the risk of offending without meaning it.

Given that our religion is less forgiving, and imposing of more suffering, what do we gain by staying in it?

In fact, thinking of this, one realizes that the Hindu scriptures mostly don't attack someone who leaves Hinduism for another religion. The bullying of traditional Hinduism is all reserved for those who care for it. With the Abrahamic religions, at least the ones other than Judaism, it is the opposite: they bully those who don't belong to them, but are relatively lenient on those who belong to them provided a few simple rules of propriety are observed.

Notice this pathology: traditional Hinduism doesn't want me or care for me. It simply says that if I want it, it will put me through a lot of humiliation and constraints. So why should I want it?

I would say traditional Hindu religion is less forgiving primarily to the brahmins, in the agama ritual sense that you are talking about. They have a hundred dos and don'ts imposed on their daily behaviour that are not so on the other varnas, least on the shudras. For the latter, the path is simple: doing their occupational svadharma and following path of bhakti and generic sadhana of other kinds. I mean, if you go out seeking tantric sadhana and then cry ignorance about its dangers, that's like unnecessarily taking some "vitamin pills" and crying about a consequent stomach ache because the label did not have the warning. It can happen. There is nothing less forgiving about it since that pill is not recommended or required for you. Yes, the complaint about the label could be valid or the "Pharmacist should have told me beforehand", but it is not a case of the hospital requiring its consumption.

But yes, if the brahmins fail their (ritualistic) duties (including to the temple deities), then there can be repercussions onto the rest of the society. And it is easier to fail there because of the level of dos and don'ts. Like, if the military becomes corrupt, the fallout is that the whole country is in danger and eventually starts getting overwhelmed by aggressive neighbours. But as far as traditionalism is concerned, such a repercussion is not limited to "Hindus alone". If you believe in the reality of devatas, then they are not only devatas for the Hindus and not for the Muslim. For example, everyone will be impacted if the rains don't come (even if some may find it helpful and some not, depending on the phala they have to experience); but in general, if the norm is to have rains and they don't, say, because the brahmin failed his duty, then all people "Hindu" or "otherwise" are affected. So it is in the best interest of society that each varna does its duties and especially brahmins with regard to rituals and temples. Sanatana dharma offers you knowledge that will remain valid whether you know it or not, follow it or not. By all means, a Hindu has the option to formally convert to Islam or Christianity. Such a conversion may itself amount to failure of svadharma and will have its future phala. But in any case, let's assume a born abrahamic follows his religion and it has less number of rules. That is not very different from the situation of a general shudra in Hinduism. He also does not know and does not need to know all the things the Brahmana must do. Being knowingly in the sanatana dharma fold, his responsibilities may be higher to help support the overall integrity of the Dharma, but it is not a case where he has to burden himself thinking of the dos and don'ts of Brahmins and temple duties. That is not his duty. If such knowledge comes naturally, ok then he can take

impetus to help and support but failure otherwise is not an individual crime on his part. The religion's requirements for him are themselves simpler and lot more forgiving.

Friend:

I am afraid my response is not going to be comprehensive, since there is a lot in your email. I will respond to the points which catch me the most:

1. "Ok, leaving those doubts, let me just assume that by tantra, you just mean the daily rules of worship of the deity by the priest of the temple."

This is indeed what I meant. As far as I understand, Agama-shAstra is just another terminology used for some forms of worship that evolved from tAntric sAdhana-s.

2. "That is presumably a pact we make if it is assumed we have asked the deity to reside in the temple, and..."

No pact should be made without informing its stakeholders of the terms and conditions. This is also why your point "And svadharma may not be "teach everyone everything." is invalid. You can't stab me and then say that it is okay because your svadharma doesn't proscribe it.

3. "There are in Hindu scriptures "arthaavada" statements that may over-emphasize for the sake of stressing importance but not to be taken literally. These could be in that category"

Well, Deepa Duraiswamy in her interview says that the king and the country would be destroyed, and I don't remember seeing anyone complaining that it was arthavAda. Now even if such an interpretation is to be made, that would need not just one practitioner-scholar of tradition to confirm, but a sufficiently large and representative galaxy of them, without significant opposition from the rest. Give us a comprehensive and satisfactory, honest assurance, and have Deepa Duraiswamy apologize for fear-mongering. Else destroy destroy destroy.

4. " The public should be better informed of potential dangers...But the problem is that such communication cannot influence atheistic or other-religion people who are often controlling the narratives and the temples."

This is missing the point: my point is that not informing the believers of

potential dangers is tantamount of scamming. It is dishonesty. Everything else is beside the point. I too hate the Dravidianists but that is a different point, not relevant here.

5. Nagarattars etc. -- none of that proves anything. As I told you, people just worship at temples because they think the deity is powerful, not because they think the complicated Agamic rules induce piety. In that vein, the Nagarattars etc. funded the temples most likely because they just saw funding temples as a means of gaining merit and thus indirectly wealth etc. There is no contradiction to either your or my views there, it is at best irrelevant here.
6. ""(c) If some rival of mine goes to the temple and prays to bump me off, ..."

I already told how this is seen in the context of karma-karmaphala. Your rival cannot do a thing to you unless you already earned that result through your karma"

This is the horriblest part of your emails. Allow me to say that I am disgusted. You are basically justifying the temple being an instrument of violence, because the victim of that violence deserved it as per karma. Remember that story of a Muslim guy leading a cow to a butcher shop, feeling tired, eating shrAddha meal to be refreshed, and the sin falling on whoever gave the shrAddha meal? In that example, the meal-provider was not even giving the weapon, merely giving general empowerment, and here the temple is consciously providing the main weapon to victimize. How does one not feel disgusted by Hinduism if this sort of horrible victim-blaming is justified using karma? Just as karma theory cannot and should not justify the action of this hypothetical rival, as you agree too, it similarly should not justify the temple empowering the rival specifically to destroy me (it is understandable if the temple generally empowers the rival in general terms, but not for the specific purpose of destroying me).

7. "Certainly in Kapali or TN temples, you can sit somewhere and meditate!"

Only in the sense that someone who really wants to meditate there is not prevented. But there is no particular facility either. So my question is this, and this one is more of a question than an objection: why doesn't this prove that the temple is not serious as a meditation-spot?

8. "Focus on the purpose of your visit. The frustration becomes positive when you see the Lord."

That was not my experience given how much I suffered. I was subject to humiliatingly being laughed at, with full eye-contact, by hooliganish devotees. The whole thing brought a horrible horrible headache, and despite taking a crocin, it did not go. At least from my superficial considerations, I can't experience a spiritual gain.

Since I am afraid you will again try to miss this point, let me articulate it differently. In meditation, there is emphasis on comfortable posture that does not induce sleep or laziness. We are supposed to engineer our circumstances not to get disturbed. It is generally understood that the experience should not be too unpleasant. All of that looks like common sense to me. Why o why o why is it that the temples don't even attempt anything remotely like this? Everything has to be sweaty, noisy, rushed, quarrelsome etc. All of the seemingly common sense principles one associated to meditation seems nullified by temples.

BTW there was one bit you didn't answer. The timings of the Tirupati temple were allegedly increased to get more revenue. Are decisions like this always done with full blessings of the experts, or do the experts just quietly agree to it because their life will become troublesome if they protest? No one tells us.

9. "I would say traditional Hindu religion is less forgiving primarily to the brahmins,"

Two problems here. One, I am not a brahmin, my grandparents weren't, and their lives had too many rules and complications, which were thankfully dropped in their time. For instance women should remain confined to a small territory during their periods (I am not talking of attending pujas etc., just having to stay put without moving about), ladles used to take one kind of food could not be used to take another kind of food, rahukAlam etc. So even for non-brahmins things weren't as simple as with Christianity or Islam.

Second problem: you guys crib all the time that Brahmins have dropped most of the traditional insistences. But what do you expect? You made life hell, and now you are acting surprised that people don't want to go through torture with no apparent gain -- do you see that it is not even obvious that sticking to all these constraints brings spiritual gain?

Let me go off on a bit of a tangent. You must have seen and appreciated as to how many old beautiful customs Japanese continue with. The commodore Perry stuff was a big shock to Japan, and led to the Meiji

restoration. They abandoned many traditional things like caste and so on, but then many traditional craftsmen also continued with their traditional crafts by modernising. You can see, for instance, a youtube documentary about some knife-maker who first wanted to quit his traditional family vocation and become a rock star, but voluntarily got into knife-making. His grandfather, if I remember right, brought in modern equipment. The point is that, while mechanization meant that they can't compete with usual mass produced knives in the common market, they could produce highly specialized knives used in high end restaurants in various countries.

When India faced similar pressures, the traditionalist Brahmins did not go around helping traditional castes-people to do anything of the sort. They simply said "Live according to caste, bro, our ancestors thought through everything bro, ancestors are awesome, bro". In India, which communities have tradition helped? It might have helped some Brahmins who got into academia because they were studying anyway, and it certainly helped some Vysya groups from Gujarat and Rajasthan who dominate India's big industrialist list (why are the Nagarattars not so prominent there? I don't know). But most people of most castes were impoverished, and the traditionalists could not envisage for them any way to get out of the mess, other than saying "Ain't tradition awesome, bro?".

Tradition has a high place of respect in Japan, and the elites are less enamoured by western culture, arguably because it doesn't simply hector and harangue, it makes its beauty and utility manifest, in a manner that everyone can relate. While our traditionalists are full of contempt for everyone, and pretend to be surprised at why Indians are so self-loathing. Have you seen how nice and beautiful temples in Japan are? I haven't been to Japan, but the videos make it clear that those temples are simply better spaces than our ugly monstrosities full of heat and noise and sweat.

Come down from your perches. Not all who seem to abhor tradition do so because they get a pleasure from doing so (that would be applicable to a lot of Dravidianists etc. but not the average Indian westernized fellow). If people have a duty to tradition, I would argue that the tradition also has some duty: at the very minimum, it should give a remote glimpse as to why it is worth following, as to why it can enrich our lives: either it shouldn't expect people to work, or it should give people something ****conspicuously**** in return for their effort.

Otherwise all you will do is to maintain your high ground, and contentedly blast everyone, and one day realize with surprise that atheism and other

religions have taken the country over.

Me:

1. "That is presumably a pact we make if it is assumed we have asked the deity to reside in the temple, and..."

No pact should be made without informing its stakeholders of the terms and conditions. This is also why your point "And svadharma may not be "teach everyone everything." is invalid. You can't stab me and then say that it is okay because your svadharma doesn't proscribe it.

You are not stabbed. Don't just throw ridiculous accusations on the tradition and expect everyone to pay heed because a Duraiswamy said this or that and scared you. I went along with some of your off-handed speculation just for the hell of it; otherwise that is not the way to continue a discussion.

Besides, there is no evidence that at the time the temple was created or in subsequent centuries when traditions may have been stronger than today, the sort of warnings that you think are important were not announced. It may very well have been the norm, "Don't break the rules or such and such will happen" warned to one and all, and society towed the line as they supposedly should when it comes to temple worship. Duraiswamy could have fit in perfectly well as just the next person in those times.

As I said before, the complaint should be addressed now by conferring what is ok, important or necessary to be communicated with regard to the consequences of following or not following certain traditional injunctions for temple worship.

1. "There are in Hindu scriptures "arthaavada" statements that may over-emphasize for the sake of stressing importance but not to be taken literally. These could be in that category"

Well, Deepa Duraiswamy in her interview says that the king and the country would be destroyed, and I don't remember seeing anyone complaining that it was arthavAda. Now even if such an interpretation is to be made, that would need not just one practitioner-scholar of tradition to confirm, but a sufficiently large and representative galaxy of them, without significant opposition from the rest. Give us a comprehensive and satisfactory, honest assurance, and have Deepa Duraiswamy apologize for

fear-mongering. Else destroy destroy destroy.

First of all, DD is not my friend nor even in my recollections. I want a whole lot of people to apologize and retract what they say about Hinduism or tradition; but it is not because they represent the tradition as bonafide adhikaris.

Statements like "If you don't [worship the deity correctly], then country will be destroyed" are too general. What deity? What shastra says it? What type of worship? Context of topic? Just random Duraiswamy says something and you are upset. The deity is not some force waiting to punish simple mistakes; S/He is kaarunyamoorthi for the devotees, and that is the traditional temple-worship position for you and me. We try to follow the norms to the best of our knowledge and trust that the Lord is compassionate to empathize our ignorance otherwise. Take it like that, or indulge in paranoia and disturb yourself.

But apart from trivial mistakes, if you come with an agenda to interfere and alter the injunctions of agama shastras just because you think this or that is not right, then it is a different matter. That would be a willful offense against the Deity as per the agama shastras and then the consequences may not be good. Likewise if the tradition tells you something is important to follow in a temple, then you have to trust that not doing so is deviation from dharma and will have its own negative consequences. But what exactly that may be may not be available to our knowledge but up to Ishvara or the Deity.

2. " The public should be better informed of potential dangers...But the problem is that such communication cannot influence atheistic or other-religion people who are often controlling the narratives and the temples."

This is missing the point: my point is that not informing the believers of potential dangers is tantamount of scamming. It is dishonesty. Everything else is beside the point. I too hate the Dravidianists but that is a different point, not relevant here.

Look. The temple Deity is a "living" entity for the devotee but can be like a Father/Mother, or king/queen/PM or SC judge. There are certain decorum and rules of behaviour and interaction that are to be followed in His presence. It is in your best interest to follow the rules to the best of your knowledge and ability and trust that the King will otherwise empathize and direct others to guide you if needed. The general person is told dos and don'ts within the flow of the tradition, by elders, priests, etc., and the ministers/lawyers will be told separately the way they have to beseech on behalf of the public, the "Your honour" etc. People know that they are not to violate such rules in a flippant manner.

But spitting on the deity is not equivalent to doing namaskaram in the wrong direction. If you find shastra and acharya saying that wrong-directional namaskaram in front of temple deity will cause horrific consequences, then we can take that charge up against the followers of that tradition for not making such info public. But if you expect some big announcement of danger should you go and spit on the deity, then forget it. Such violations will in general be done only by naastikas who shouldn't even be there (like the women demanding entry into Sabarimala).

Unless we are talking very specific cases based on pramanas, the general position imo is that minor offenses will be dealt with in a proportional way by the Deity - who again is not a robot but a "living" devatha blessing the devotees.

3. Nagarattars etc. -- none of that proves anything. As I told you, people just worship at temples because they think the deity is powerful, not because they think the complicated Agamic rules induce piety. In that vein, the Nagarattars etc. funded the temples most likely because they just saw funding temples as a means of gaining merit and thus indirectly wealth etc. There is no contradiction to either your or my views there, it is at best irrelevant here.

Yes you told me, but the people did not tell you personally. Then none of that proves anything. In my opinion they value the traditions and believe they should be maintained as such.

The fact is that they built temples and alongside the Vedic schools. They supported the traditions. You can imagine it was all just a hoax to get name and fame and whatnot from fellow people. They may have been nastikas putting on a show. So none of that proves anything.

They are astikas to me. The Deity is real to them and if they thought supporting Vedic tradition alongside is important, then it was not a PR campaign to the locals but an act of svadharma and for punya to Ishvara. In other words, they believed Vedic Tradition=Dharma and their punya is by supporting Tradition.

4. ""(c) If some rival of mine goes to the temple and prays to bump me off, ..."

I already told how this is seen in the context of karma-karmaphala. Your rival cannot do a thing to you unless you already earned that result through your karma"

This is the horriblem part of your emails. Allow me to say that I am disgusted. You are basically justifying the temple being an instrument of violence, because the victim of that violence deserved it as per karma. Remember that story of a Muslim guy leading a cow to a butcher shop, feeling tired, eating shrAddha meal to be refreshed, and the sin falling on whoever gave the shrAddha meal? In that example, the meal-provider was not even giving the weapon, merely giving general empowerment, and here the temple is consciously providing the main weapon to victimize. How does one not feel disgusted by Hinduism if this sort of horrible victim-blaming is justified using karma? Just as karma theory cannot and should not justify the action of this hypothetical rival, as you agree too, it similarly should not justify the temple empowering the rival specifically to destroy me (it is understandable if the temple generally empowers the rival in general terms, but not for the specific purpose of destroying me).

Its the best part of my mail. You can be disgusted or not. Yes, if you find yourself suffering from violence, that experience is aligned to your karma and is karmaphala for what you bear responsibility for, this life or as per prarabdha karma. I am not justifying anything about the temple being used this way or that. Whether the friend does some tantra or hits you with a bat, he can succeed in impacting you only if you have made yourself the receptacle for that experience. Ishvara will otherwise not allow it to happen - for you the tantra means temple and the bat means something jada and not associated to Ishvara. Such a difference is not relevant in the context of karma-karmaphala: either act of your friend via either instrument is his supplication to God for a certain result; it will come to fruition only if your receiving such phala is in order. And the friend for his intent and action will accrue his own (likely negative) karma and will get his phala in due course.

**[Added later]

To the above has to be adjoined what I wrote earlier:

<The right response then is for me to work to adhere to my svadharma given the circumstances and whatever phalas I have to face, and my right decision may include trying to rectify the human failures. If the priest is not doing his duty and I know of it, then it may be my responsibility to intervene and make sure the priest does his duty. (report to the authorities etc.) It is not "Oh the priest is not doing his duty. Problem is the complications of the shastras. Let's get rid of the whole thing." >

Consider the situation where my 'enemy' comes to strike me with a bat and I see him coming. Whatever be the past karma from my side or his or anyone else's that brought us to this moment, still presently I have the opportunity to take a decision based on my knowledge of his impending attack. My svadharma may very well be one of fight or flight and not stay-put resignation to Ishvara's will.

So, if such is the case and I don't follow that svadharma and instead think (pretend) "Let Ishvara decide", then the phala of getting beaten by the enemy may be karmaphala simply for this karma of failing to do what must be done now to avoid that result, i.e. fight or flight. Had I followed that svadharma then and there, the experience of getting beaten may have been averted or mitigated.

In the case of the Temple and tantra-sadhana, my enemy is making an appeal to the Deity via the puja to do me harm. The Deity (Ishvara) however is not simply going to give me such an experience on account of the puja. The puja is like a proper procedure in the Court for the prosecution (my enemy) to put his case against me, seeking such and such punishment for me. The Judge will consider the full evidence of my karma record and potentially take action of any kind only if it befits my past actions. Apart from this, the seeking of suffering for others naturally carries inherent risk for the guy doing the puja, since his intent and efforts go on his karma-record, and can come back to bite him if they are adharmic. He can be charged with Contempt of Court even if the Court (Temple) receives and processes the petition, should his motivations and objectives be deemed adharmic!

So that is one part. Now, let's look at it from my standpoint. What if I learn about my enemy doing this puja? The dharmic decision could well be different in this case from the bat example. Possibly it is surrender to the judgment of Ishvara and praying to Him for guidance and protection - so that either the puja's ill-objective does not succeed; or even if I have to go through difficult experience, the Lord enables me to forbear it. The "surrender" action may be known as being proper here especially if one has clarity that it is Ishvara who blesses a puja or sadhana with results aligned to my karma and also that the enemy is himself only making an appeal to Ishvara through this tantric ritual. In particular, we know that it is Ishvara, the underlying Consciousness who must connect the enemy's karma to the manifestation of my karmaphala: He is the karmaphaladAta.

(In the bat example, to the contrary, our strong feeling is that karma causes phala directly. The enemy thinks "I will hurt him by beating with the bat" and I think "He can hurt me by striking with the bat". Neither of us are thinking of Ishvara in the middle of it and instead (as usual) are associating the mayic power of chaitanyam with the jada manifestations themselves - like the child lost his leg in the movie because of the car crash! So, in general, from the standpoint of body-

identification, the immediate dharmic response (to uphold the dharma of protecting the body) for most people would be fight or flight and not “stay put, close eyes and think of Shiva”.)

Another option may be to do a counter puja ourselves. We know ‘guru-jis’ often suggest prayaschitta through some ritual, so doing such may be the right counter karma to beseech the Lord to disregard the enemy’s puja or to protect us from its ill-effects. (This does not mean that our past karma gets annulled but simply that due to our puja or counter-sadhana, the present time and place and type of punishment based on the enemy’s own appeal may not fructify in the desired manner even if we are otherwise fit to receive it!)

But how about I jump into the temple and pour water in the fire and spoil the puja? Say, I an astika ‘know’ the power of such pujas, and therefore feel the urgency to directly stop the puja in order to protect myself. Is that not proper? There can be situations where such a response is dharmic. For example, Lakshmana prevented Indrajit from completing his yagnya that if completed would have made Indrajit invincible. But it would probably be case-by-case and not generalizable. Keep in mind, as said before, that the bat example and the puja example operate (usually) in very different ways at the physical and mental levels for the jivas who are involved, including the manner of ‘praying’ to Ishvara - so the dharmic response appropriate in one may not be in the other. But if there is belief in the direct efficacy of such “malignant” sadhana/puja, one natural (dharmic or not) way to respond would be to stop it directly if possible (and legal); if not possible, we have to accept the fuller knowledge of the tradition with regard to the karma-karmaphala Order, placing Ishvara at the Center of it, and choose from the other options available to us.

Going more extreme, how about we blame the temple that allows for this sort of puja and seek the end of the temple or such puja altogether? This is similar to the original proposal for which this example is cited.

First of all, we cannot portray this peculiar presumptive example as representing traditionalism or traditional temples. I already made this point early on, that the traditionalist and majority of devotees typically relate to temples in terms of regular deity worship or special archanas of positive nature. And as far as I know, that is how most temples operate. Even the shatru-samhara type pujas are typically advertised as aimed at nullifying ill-forces of extraordinary or subtle kinds, and not the “hurt your neighbor” variety. See the 2 main replies at this link: <https://hinduism.stackexchange.com/questions/2521/what-is-the-purpose-of-shathru-samhara-pooja> But the main perspective from a traditionalist would be that even if there are such tantra pujas and yagnyas employed at some temple, they can be efficacious only in impacting those for whom the experience will fit as

karmaphala. Because they all land on the Desk of the Judge in the Court of Appeals, Ishvara, who is not deceived or biased in His distribution of Results - the experience of which liberates the jiva from the weight of its past karma and facilitates its further journey to realizing Moksha. Therefore, seeking to destroy agamic temples in order to avoid "disastrous mishap on account of tantra abuse" is ultimately an undue overreaction.]

5. "Certainly in Kapali or TN temples, you can sit somewhere and meditate!"

Only in the sense that someone who really wants to meditate there is not prevented. But there is no particular facility either. So my question is this, and this one is more of a question than an objection: why doesn't this prove that the temple is not serious as a meditation-spot?

That is not a requirement. Why should it be a meditation spot because you want one? If you think you can meditate only if it is some special space, go elsewhere. Get what the temple offers. Those who go there are fine with that and if needed they go elsewhere to meditate etc. Of course, you may have newer temples or RKM type constructions that try to cater to your ideas. Doesn't mean the old types are at fault.

6. "Focus on the purpose of your visit. The frustration becomes positive when you see the Lord."

That was not my experience given how much I suffered. I was subject to humiliatingly being laughed at, with full eye-contact, by hooliganish devotees. The whole thing brought a horrible horrible headache, and despite taking a crocin, it did not go. At least from my superficial considerations, I can't experience a spiritual gain.

Since I am afraid you will again try to miss this point, let me articulate it differently. In meditation, there is emphasis on comfortable posture that does not induce sleep or laziness. We are supposed to engineer our circumstances not to get disturbed. It is generally understood that the experience should not be too unpleasant. All of that looks like common sense to me. Why o why o why is it that the temples don't even attempt anything remotely like this? Everything has to be sweaty, noisy, rushed, quarrelsome etc. All of the seemingly common sense principles one associated to meditation seems nullified by temples.

Because most people are quite fine with that.* I am quite happy with my experience in the temples. I go there to see God. I like the fact that others are also there for such common purpose. If at all I need my own space, I can always remove myself to some corner or anywhere, inside the shrine area or in the open spaces, sit and read sacred texts or close my eyes and meditate. Fact is there are great temples that are often having very little human presence (like Kesava Perumal temple), so I can in fact do meditation there quite undisturbed.

[* - I wanted to add a clarification. The hooliganism in tirupathi queue. I did not respond with empathy here, but there is a distinction between general group processions that can lead to shoving around and the fact that such an environment can facilitate actual hooliganism of various kinds (and in other places, stampedes resulting in deaths). The latter is not a normal or good thing and it would make sense to improve the operations of the temples to minimize such outcomes. Being packed in a crowd when going for darshan is not a requirement as per "tradition" or "Shastra"; it is more a circumstance of the crowds seeking entrance. So, my point is not an endorsement of not seeking to improve such things, in the name of tradition. The principle however is neither to castigate the general temple setup as if such hooliganism defines the experience for devotees in general; but to mitigate the possibility of people getting harassed and struggling with the experience. Ideally, more data should be collected (by astikas who support traditional temples imo but want to address this problem better) to understand the extent of devotees' experiences of willful hooliganism.]

1. BTW there was one bit you didn't answer. The timings of the Tirupati temple were allegedly increased to get more revenue. Are decisions like this always done with full blessings of the experts, or do the experts just quietly agree to it because their life will become troublesome if they protest? No one tells us.

I have no clue on this. Clearly it is a problem tied with the fact that the admin of temples is in Govt hands and not necessarily under the control of acharyas. I know there is an Iyengar on youtube who points to issues like this and in fact blasts tirupathi or sri rangam in unequivocal manner for caving into political or other pressures and compromising the way it is to be. So he would likely agree with your latter position, and he does tell you if you can find his name and videos.

2. "I would say traditional Hindu religion is less forgiving primarily to the brahmins,"

Two problems here. One, I am not a brahmin, my grandparents weren't,

and their lives had too many rules and complications, which were thankfully dropped in their time. For instance women should remain confined to a small territory during their periods (I am not talking of attending pujas etc., just having to stay put without moving about), ladles used to take one kind of food could not be used to take another kind of food, rahukAlam etc. So even for non-brahmins things weren't as simple as with Christianity or Islam.

I understand your complaint here is general but I was attempting to stay on the temple agama ritual or god-worship topic, where brahmins by virtue of their svadharma have less-forgiving requirements on what they must do daily.

In any case, the question is whether it is dharma or not. If you don't believe the religious injunctions or think they are only practical for those times and the religious overlay is just to make people follow such man-made rules, then you can dismiss them all as insubstantial today. I would suggest you do the same with all this tantra talk rather than act like the traditional injunction would matter only with regard to deity worship and not daily life. Or you have to decide the basis for your distinction. Suppose the traditionalist comes out with a shastra saying if you don't follow the rules of your grandparents, then you will meet with such and such doom. What then? If instead you will not accept dharma passed on by family traditions and will only accept what is known through some other pramana like the shastras (and hence tantra matters), then don't worry about what traditionalists think about acharams etc. that are known only by recourse to "tradition"; let them follow theirs and you follow yours. You can uncomplicate your existence as you please, to the extent you feel confident the traditionalist is claiming unnecessary things as dharma.

If contrary to your opinion, following such tradition is svadharma for that jiva, then by not following it commits adharma and will later digest the phala.

Yes, you being born in a Hindu family may mean you have a different more complicated set of dharma to abide by than someone born elsewhere. Too bad. The traditional religion tells what it thinks is true. No point blaming the religion for it and saying some other religion is simpler. You can not follow or you can convert. If the religion is right, you will face negative phala for your swerving from svadharma; if the religion is false, then you are free. But you can't say "Down with the traditional religion" because "I don't believe or I don't want to believe what it says".

Second problem: you guys crib all the time that Brahmins have dropped most of the traditional insistences. But what do you expect? You made life hell, and now

you are acting surprised that people don't want to go through torture with no apparent gain -- do you see that it is not even obvious that sticking to all these constraints brings spiritual gain?

It is also not obvious that bending the pinky wrong way will bring death and destruction. Why do you crib? Just throw away your paranoia and imagine none of that is true and be happy. We crib for similar reasons, because when we accept or believe it is svadharma and still we leave it intentionally, the corollary is we have deviated from dharma and hence will become subject to karmaphala at Ishvara's discretion. No point later whining "Why am I going through such suffering?"

Let me go off on a bit of a tangent. You must have seen and appreciated as to how many old beautiful customs Japanese continue with. The commodore Perry stuff was a big shock to Japan, and led to the Meiji restoration. They abandoned many traditional things like caste and so on, but then many traditional craftsmen also continued with their traditional crafts by modernising. You can see, for instance, a youtube documentary about some knife-maker who first wanted to quit his traditional family vocation and become a rock star, but voluntarily got into knife-making. His grandfather, if I remember right, brought in modern equipment. The point is that, while mechanization meant that they can't compete with usual mass produced knives in the common market, they could produce highly specialized knives used in high end restaurants in various countries.

When India faced similar pressures, the traditionalist Brahmins did not go around helping traditional castes-people to do anything of the sort. They simply said "Live according to caste, bro, our ancestors thought through everything bro, ancestors are awesome, bro". In India, which communities have tradition helped? It might have helped some Brahmins who got into academia because they were studying anyway, and it certainly helped some Vysya groups from Gujarat and Rajasthan who dominate India's big industrialist list (why are the Nagarattars not so prominent there? I don't know). But most people of most castes were impoverished, and the traditionalists could not envisage for them any way to get out of the mess, other than saying "Ain't tradition awesome, bro?".

The traditionalist does not think of his religion as man-made. He in fact regards Veda as apaurusheya - not man-made. He tells on the purusharthas based on his reading of the scriptures that he believes are rooted in the infallible Vedas. In other words, your arguments on what this group of humans did and that did not are not going to negate the validity of traditional religion or its ideas on dharma. The fact that you think tradition helped brahmins because they got into academia shows rank ignorance, because such getting into academia will likely be cause

for his swerving from his own svadharma in various ways. That jiva will presumably be cycled back into the karma cycle in future lives into *more forgiving* varnas and religions. He can then be happier with simpler requirements of traditional dharma.

The traditionalists will argue that it is adherence to varnashrama and traditional dharma that helped keep Hinduism and Hindu society largely intact and stable during Islamic and British/Christian rule, unlike other civilizations that got wiped out in the past by foreign invasions.

Anycase, no one is forcing you to follow it. No one is forcing you to believe Duraiswamy either.

1.

Tradition has a high place of respect in Japan, and the elites are less enamoured by western culture, arguably because it doesn't simply hector and harangue, it makes its beauty and utility manifest, in a manner that everyone can relate. While our traditionalists are full of contempt for everyone, and pretend to be surprised at why Indians are so self-loathing. Have you seen how nice and beautiful temples in Japan are? I haven't been to Japan, but the videos make it clear that those temples are simply better spaces than our ugly monstrosities full of heat and noise and sweat.

Irrelevant and subjective drivel. I think Hindu temples are beautiful and blissful and evoking of bhakti. I am also thrilled seeing other Hindus coming there with bhakti and seeking darshan of God. They work for the devotees who go there. I am sure I will appreciate Japanese temples as well; but doesn't mean I would wish ours were replaced with their models.

It is also false to say traditionalists are full of contempt for everyone. Rather clear from your mail the contempt you have for traditionalists. Anycase, contempt can come if one side thinks the other side is cause of misery for Hindus and destruction of Hinduism and there is a need to protect the individual and the religion. For the traditionalist, tradition constitutes Hindu dharma and failure in dharma will lead to various negative phala including the weakening of Hinduism. So the traditionalist will regard it his svadharma to "fight" for tradition/dharma as it is taught to him.

1. Come down from your perches. Not all who seem to abhor tradition do so because they get a pleasure from doing so (that would be applicable to a lot of Dravidianists etc. but not the average Indian westernized fellow). If people have a duty to tradition, I would argue that the tradition also has

some duty: at the very minimum, it should give a remote glimpse as to why it is worth following, as to why it can enrich our lives: either it shouldn't expect people to work, or it should give people something ****conspicuously**** in return for their effort.

Karma yoga via following of dharma is the way to attaining chitta-shuddhi. It clears your mind from the mess and clutter that prevents assimilation of atmajnana. More conspicuously, when you follow Hindu tradition, you are representing your religion and its presence both to your own mind and to others around you. When you follow Western tradition, you are not representing your religion; you efface one more anchor of Hindu identity from your life and become a comfortable anonymous to everyone who wants your religion eliminated.

1. Otherwise all you will do is to maintain your high ground, and contentedly blast everyone, and one day realize with surprise that atheism and other religions have taken the country over.

They take over because guys like you don't follow Hindu tradition and lecture those who do.

Friend:

I guess we have consensus that the traditionalist perspective is the following:

"Too bad. The traditional religion tells what it thinks is true. No point blaming the religion for it and saying some other religion is simpler. You can not follow or you can convert."

The traditionalists want to simply go by what the traditional religion thinks is true, and will not take responsibility for abetting violence on me, saying that it is just my karmaphala. The traditional religion doesn't care if I follow or convert, unlike Christianity and Islam which actually want others to follow them. Fair enough.

Do you remember your strongly arguing with [Name] and [Name] how they should realize that what they have is only belief and not knowledge? I see that you are nevertheless based on operating based on belief and abetting potential violence on others, as long as it can be construed as not violent within your belief system. That will certainly impact my attitude towards your belief system.

Good luck. I see that you guys have been achieving such stunning success due to the robustness and validity of your beliefs.

Me:

You can reduce to whatever tidbit makes you feel good. Your whole premise was fussing about traditionalists not telling bad outcome of tantra sadhana. As if you honestly felt agitated that such dire consequences are based on your idea of knowledge and not traditionalist's belief. NEWS flash: all that tantra too reduces to his belief and if you want to put on a cry-show about that belief as if it is real to you and everyone else, then you better accept the fuller context of his belief system in which he operates and how he makes sense out of it. We can have consensus about your hypocrisy. That's all.

[(Add a note not in reply to friend) On the last point, one of the valid pramanas or means of knowledge for a traditionalist is shabda (Veda and allied shastras, words of saints/seers, etc.) Shabda pramana is used to obtain "knowledge" of things like visesha dharma, moksha, Ishvara, karma-karmaphala Order, temple worship, etc., that is not available directly to the senses and mind. But this all will belong to the realm of "belief" from the perspective of a non-traditionalist or rationalist. So while concepts like temple deity or tantra sadhana may be regarded by the traditionalist as knowledge based on some scriptural source, they can just as well be uniformly regarded as "belief" or "imagination" in the context of a system of knowledge that does not accept shabda as pramana.]

Friend:

Consensus is what both parties agree on, not what your side wants to believe.

Me:

So when you take a statement I wrote in a large reply and decide you have consensus with me and then write further of your imaginations on my side, it is based on your interpretation to which I may not be in agreement.

Friend:

I agreed with your quote, you wanted me to agree with your alleged summary of my views.

Friend:

Scratch it, you didn't even only want me to agree with your alleged summary, you wanted me to agree with your labeling of it as hypocrisy.

Me:

No problem. Will scratch it for you. Right. You don't have to agree. Its just my belief.

[At this point, we may say this session is wound down. So, the END.]