

Traditionalist vs Anti-traditionalist: a conversation (March 2020)

Anti-traditionalist:

I think not following traditions or following it - whether crossing the 7-seas and going to US, working for a living instead of asking for alms, not following prescribed varna duty of being a manual labourer because of higher mental makeup, or not wearing thali, or not wearing 9 yards are all personal choices. We all are in the quest for spiritual upliftment whether we like it or not.

Traditionalist:

I think the same of this coronavirus and how I deal with it. I am not responsible for people's crazy apprehensions and fear mongering. That's their religion, not mine; they should smile and accept me for my freedom though they imagine imaginary potential harms. Thank you.

However, let's look at Sandhyavandanam. When the brahmin doesn't fulfill his svadharma, he is committing papa against himself and others, so others have a say if they think the brahmin leaving his duties is harming society as a whole. That's why the Paramacharya thought different from you.

Anti-traditionalist:

Spiritual journeys are very personal in Sanathana Dharmam. Sanathana Dharmam is not a dogma like the proselytizing Abrahamic religions - and that's why there are so many pluralistic schools of thought sometimes completely opposite to each other. People still follow mutual respect.

This cannot be compared with coronavirus which is a global pandemic right now, and a person may even put others nearby at risk of death.

Traditionalist:

I am talking only with regard to those who follow the shankara sampradaya. If I speak on Advaita as truth, I am obviously not talking to a vaishnavite unless I seek to debate. I speak to my group the positions of this sampradaya which is in principle adhered to by the family. That family members deviate from dharma or commit adharma does not mean dharma and adharma become personal decisions as far as the sampradaya is concerned. Being born in a Brahmana

smartha family, if I don't do sandhyavandana etc etc in the name of personal exploration, then as far as the shankara sampradaya teachings are concerned, I am failing in my essential duties to myself and society and that will accrue as negative karma. And karma begets karmaphala. I will say this to any of you any day (from the standpoint of being in family and part of the sampradaya); we may all be failing in this and that, but if we choose to justify in all these flamboyant notions of religion, we are bs'ing ourselves.

Your last sentence is nice. It shows the power of shraddha in your religion that makes you see it in a special light against mine. You cannot similarly understand the shraddha in shastra pramana (due to our natural nastika inclinations) without conflating it with violent religions.

[Later] Take upanayana, marriage, shraardham, child's first year function, etc. All these the smartha conducts according to his family vaidika tradition. He has smartha shastrigals come over and chant mantras etc. Nothing is arbitrary or ambiguous, in rights, rites, duties, purpose, results sought, etc., as per the tradition. But this fellow argues later all that is merely personal fancy for his spiritual journey that he can use and throw away as he pleases. The arguments he gives are most disrespectful for all of that Hindu tradition. But he expects "mutual respect" in return.

Conducting a marriage or upanayana according to Hindu tradition means you are entering an agreement to the witness of devathas and the society to adhere by the dharma as dilineated in the shastras/tradition. Mantras, thali, poonal, sandhyavandana, etc. are sacred things in the Hindu traditions they are part of. They are not our things to do and undo as and how we please because it is our personal choice. If the Hindu/smartha goes through such vaidika karmas, then those who are part of that tradition expect that he respects the dharma-basis of that karma and at least in principle seeks to abide by it. If instead he says "I will do as I please because I am independent (Hindu)", then he has essentially lured the rest of us (including the shastrigals) into such sacred occasions of great significance to the sampradaya and to Hinduism in general, only to have it all cheapened and disrespected as insignificant, unnecessary, non-committal (not to mention in other cases, denigrated as discriminatory, oppressive, patriarchal, etc.). And he is so oblivious to the harm he is doing to Hinduism that he wonders why traditional Hindus don't show him mutual respect.

Sorry sir; he will get my hardest harshest condemnation... They are the very cause for the suffering and disintegration of Hinduism.

PS. this "personal spiritual journey" argument is typically a cover for the usual shame, desire, fear, ego forces that impel our decisions. We have to introspect there. [...]

The "spiritual journey" that guides the Hindu/brahmin to give up thali, poonal, kudumi, etc. and replace with other personalized approaches is likely compromising itself at the very start and it will take enormous efforts to regain the lost mental ground.

Anti-traditionalist:

It all boils down to this for me - how much structured religious beliefs, conditions, and rules do we follow? Its certain that all these rules were made up by men living in society at various times. And over time, our practices have evolved. To that extent, it would be interesting to find out when the practice of vegetarianism in the Brahmin community started, and why Bengali Brahmins including SRK ate fish.

Practices evolve, and it should be human nature to question these practices whether Islamic, Christian, Smarthaic, Vaishnavite, Ramakrishna mission or otherwise. No practice is beyond question. Why did Adi Shankarar do shastanga namaskarsm to a rag picker on the street and take him as a guru?

The spiritual process should be one where we strive to throw away all identities possible, to the extent possible, while still following practices that make sense to us.

Traditionalist:

Hey, you are not the first to question any of this. We have plenty and will have plenty. Join them and find your religion. Don't mix it with orthodox sampradayas and ask us to join your explorations.

As I said I speak for established orthodox sampradayas like our smartha but also several others. We are to follow what is all handed down by shastra, tradition as guided by acharya. Practices evolve in these things because of folk like you and me and our half-baked understanding. Are we scholars of Veda, Vedangas, and other allied shastras that we can start whimsically commenting on this and that? We know not our ignorance. That is fine. I already said, I have no problem in [you] the independent Hindu; but because you are intertwined with the smartha sampradaya through our family connection, your contradicting views have to be

taken seriously since you are out to confuse the rest of us. Because you partake in smartha traditional rituals etc., whose basis is orthodox tradition, and yet later dismiss their substance and demands, you have to be taken as a problem character who will destroy the strength of the sampradaya from within, therefore someone has to keep opposing folk like you.