

Heritage and Authenticity in an Era of Shifting Physical and Ritual Geographies

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Abstract: forms of religious authority operate with respect to a class of ritual therapies for a negative horoscopic condition called *nagadosham* (snake blemish) in three spaces: Hindu temples in the United States, the renowned Hindu temple at Kalahasti in India, and online chat rooms and forums. The remedial ritual, on which this paper focuses, *kala sarpadoshanivarana*, is intended to counteract *nagadosham*, a malignant astrological condition that is primarily faulted for causing delayed marriage and infertility and which is understood to be increasingly prevalent in contemporary times. By bringing ethnographic fieldwork conducted among transnational Hindus in the United States into conversation with research carried out at the Kalahasti temple in South India and the virtual space of an online discussion board, www.IndusLadies.com, this paper demonstrates that perceptions of heritage are shifting along with ideas about the locus of authority and authenticity for many transnational Hindus. In the context of these new physical and ritual geographies, the aspiration to return to India's sacred sites may be displaced by a willingness to undertake ritual performances at North American temples, and the ritual therapies suggested by family astrologers and priests may be supplanted by those recommended by Internet interlocutors.