

Siddha Medicine in the context of neo-Hindu organizations in contemporary South India: the convergence of religion and medicine.

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Synopsis

This doctoral thesis examines the involvement of neo-Hindu organizations in Siddha medicine (citta maruttuvam), the so-called 'Tamil medicine', in contemporary South India. It shows a special interest in social configurations that emerge when religious organizations participate in the medical domain. The thesis focuses on the convergence of religion and medicine by analyzing the Siddha medical practice of three Hindu guru organizations. It led by a set of four questions: Firstly, a descriptive question: What kind of Siddha medical activities can be observed in the context of religious organizations? Secondly, a question which goes an analytical step further: Which social formations (practice and discourse) emerge through the participation of religious organizations in Siddha medicine? Thirdly, a question which asks for an explanatory frame: How can we explain the motivation of religious organizations in participating in Siddha medicine? And finally, a question which targets the meta-level of scientific reflection: What can we learn from the specific dynamics in my research field for further inquiries in the domain of the study of Hindu guru organizations? The data of the study was obtained through fieldwork carried out in the south Indian states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala. The fieldwork was designed as a multi-sited ethnography generating data through the application of different qualitative research methods in locations where the three religious organizations carry out Siddha medical practice. The data corpus consists (a) of ethnographic interviews with people involved in the production, distribution and consumption of Siddha medicine, (b) of observations of actual "doings", and (c) of written textual documents which inform about the Siddha medical practice. With its interest in the interplay between religious organizations and Siddha medicine this doctoral thesis participates in the academic debate about the involvement of religious organizations in secular activities. One of the main analytic lenses through which the research is framed is medical pluralism which proves instructive because it allows studying the relationship between religious organizations and the state and emphasizes identity politics which are at stake in the medical realm. With regard to identity politics the analysis is informed by elements from the orientalism debate as well as the Tamil revivalist movement. To sum it up, this study brings together research on Hindu guru organizations, medical pluralism in India and orientalism through the study of the participation of three guru organizations in Siddha medicine.