

***Marunnum mantravaum* - Interactions of Ritual Healing, Ayurveda and  
Biomedicine in a Traditional Healing Practice in North Kerala, India**

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Poonkutilmana is a high caste Nambudiri Brahman family situated in Malappuram a district in Kerala with a predominantly Muslim population. The male members of this family practice the traditional art of healing. Which they do only inside their old *mana*, the traditional family house. This house also holds temples of their worshipping deities *Devi*, the Goddess and *Ganapathi* the elephant headed God, the destroyer of obstacles. Their clients are mostly from the same district but they also receive clients from far off places these days due to the publicity gained through the print media and internet. The clientele consists of a sizable number of Muslims and the healers declare their openness showing the open gate which according to them is never closed. They have a specific healing tradition which combines Ayurveda, the Indian system of medicine with *mantravada* (translated often as sorcery or witchcraft but literally the use of mantras). They practice a non institutionalized form of Ayurveda, because they are trained at their homes by apprenticeship and have not gained qualifications from any teaching institutions. Their practice is said to be informed by perceived notions of psychiatry and hence 'psycho religious therapy' as opined by Tarabout. (Tarabout1999). But the interaction of Mantravada (ritual healing) and Ayurveda (traditional medicine) with Biomedicine in this practice is marked by a subtle pantheistic approach rather than competition or hegemony. Even though the ultimate aim of the healing and Ayurveda was to wean off patients from Biomedicines, the approach was to go on with tapering doses rather than complete withdrawal. Based on a field work done in this healing practice, the paper will argue that such complex practices could not be completely understood in terms of the binaries of nature-culture, tradition- modernity or religion- medicine and may demand different conceptual frames.

**Bibliography:**

Tarabout, Gilles.1999. Psycho-Religious therapy in Kerala as a form of interaction between Local Traditions and (perceived) Scientific Discourse. In Marine Carrin (ed), *Managing Distress. Possession and therapeutic cults in South Asia*. New Delhi: Manohar Publishers and distributors, pp. 133-154.