

Defying the Mind-Body Dichotomy and Profit-Based Medicine: Siddha Practitioners Perceptions and Practices of Healing.

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The “health” and “wellness” of human populations cannot be stripped away from the economic context that people live their lives in. Access to work, food and shelter are fundamental to good health yet it is these very things are often sacrificed in the unrelentless expansion of a liberal economy. While biomedicine at its most fundamental level reduces a person to a mere organ, when combined with a private/for profit health care system, a contradiction is created whereby health can never be realized. This paper is the first in a series of papers on the Siddha system in South India and based on an extended period of multisided fieldwork in Pondicherry, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka between 2007 and 2008. In this paper I want to emphasize the indigenous perceptions held among practitioners of how Siddha differs from profit-based biomedicine. Notions of what constitute science according to these practitioners as a practice that must be human centered and not profit oriented will also be put central in the analysis. These notions are integrally linked to a series of social movements that sought to imbibe rationality and a scientific perceptiveness at the turn of the century; science being here defined as a process which places the human factor first, and individual profit last.