



HAL
open science

”Passions” in the Discourses on Witchcraft in Kerala

Gilles Tarabout

► **To cite this version:**

Gilles Tarabout. ”Passions” in the Discourses on Witchcraft in Kerala. *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 2000, 28, pp.651-664. hal-00524111

HAL Id: hal-00524111

<https://hal.science/hal-00524111>

Submitted on 6 Oct 2010

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L’archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d’enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

/p.651/

"PASSIONS" IN THE DISCOURSES ON WITCHCRAFT IN KERALA

Gilles Tarabout (CNRS)

This paper is about misfortune as elaborated in the narratives of (counter-) witchcraft practitioners and consultants. Their statements can be read from different perspectives, and I choose here to look at them specifically in terms of "passions" and their control.¹

Since the purpose of this paper is not a cross-cultural comparison in the definitions of emotions (see Lynch 1990) ready-made translations of Malayalam terms will be used, like "anger" or "wrath" for *kōpam*, leaving out precise delimitation of their connotations (for such a perspective see, for instance, Kakar, 1982 or Obeyesekere, 1975). Information was gathered in the upper and middle levels of society (Brahmins, nayars, *īlavar*, *kaṇiyān*) so that remarks made here cannot be extended to groups of lower status without further enquiry. Most of the citations below will be taken from a single *kaṇiyān* specialist (both an astrologer and a witchcraft practitioner) living in the outskirts of Trivandrum, referred to below as "Asan". His statements are in accordance with all my information available from other sources.

Before going into the heart of the subject, I will say a few words about "misfortune" and "witchcraft". *Misfortune* is used for events which are interpreted as involving an occult cause because they occur in series or possess an "untimely" or "striking" nature -whatever people might mean by that. *Witchcraft* will be considered as a symbolic way (one among others) of representing misfortune, and of tackling it. There are no grounds in Kerala to distinguish, as is sometimes done in anthropological writings, between witchcraft (implying an inherited power) and sorcery (restricted to acquired charms).² Moreover, the popular opinion, which contrasts witchcraft and counter-witchcraft, is pertinent only as far as subjective viewpoints in narratives are concerned. The English terms "witch", "sorcerer", "witch-doctor", and "exorcist" are all implied by the Malayalam word *mantravādi*, the expert in mantras (his speciality being *mantravādam*).

Concentrating on witchcraft in this broad sense should not give the impression that everybody in Kerala is convinced of its reality. Many persons would brand it as mere superstition, while many more /p.652/ (though not necessarily the same ones) never approach a *mantravādi*. Nevertheless, and without taking into account what is exactly meant by the affirmation of a "belief" or a "disbelief", it is a fact that this way of tackling misfortune is today alive and well in all areas and among persons of all strata of society (compare Obeyesekere, 1975; Pandya, 1982). We should also remember that as a system of representations and values witchcraft relies heavily on two highly valued disciplines generally considered in India as scientifically founded: astrology, and the use of mantras.

The paper deals first with the part played by occult aggressions in the various explanations of misfortune. The importance of the passions in this theory is discussed, and a stereotyped

characterization of the "victim" is offered. In the second part of the paper a *mantravādi* describes how he sees himself and what his modes of action are. This will enable us to specify the relationship between disruptive passions and "mindpower" and to observe how the practitioner's discourse on witchcraft involves a shift from afflictions to tactics.

1. OCCULT AGGRESSIONS

1.1. Misfortune: levels of explanation

Various complementary dimensions can be involved to explain misfortune, a fact stressed by many all over India. Let me give an example. A friend told me once in Trivandrum that his father, an official in the Forest Department, had died suddenly from a form of cancer, years ago. A few days before his death (when nobody knew about the coming event) he had consulted the family's astrologer who had foretold it. After his demise the family suspected that some witchcraft had been performed by colleagues out of jealousy. None of these explanations is exclusive of the others, because they operate on different levels: the medical aetiology is but a manifestation of an occult aggression, itself taking place within a fateful timing as shown by the stars' position and other signs. Contrary to some western misrepresentations, there is no room here for resignation: at each of these levels action is possible, be it taking medicines, propitiating the planets and/or the gods, or counteracting the enemy's spells.

At a more inclusive level is *karma*: reference to it, if made at all, is rather limited to general statements or retroactive explanations.³ Let us note that exegesis by specialists -even brahmins- can be at variance with the classic interpretation. The sanskrit verse,

/p.653/

*purva-janma-kṛtam pāpam
vyādhi-rūpeṇa jāyate*

which may be glossed "the fault done in a previous birth takes the shape of disease in this life" is cited by Asan. But in the same breath his comment goes as follows: not only one's own deeds in previous lives but also the deeds of ancestors from both the mother's and the father's side are responsible for today's misfortune. The individual *karma* suggested by the verse gives room for a "parental" responsibility -which is in fact attested throughout India.⁴ Note also that the effect of ancestors' deeds is not always clearly distinguished from a "personalized" attack by this ancestor. Take the following statement by Asan:

Suppose a man is having symptoms of gas trouble for the past 10 or 12 years. Doctors may sometimes declare after repeated check-ups that this person has no ailment of any kind. It is on such occasions that the person approaches an astrologer. The astrologer then finds out the cause of the ailment, taking into account the position of the stars at the time of the birth of the person. It may sometimes be found that the cause of the ailment is the wicked deeds of the person's father or grandfather. It is to be inferred then that the impure spirit of a dead ancestor has entered the body of the patient. It is also possible to find out whose spirit has entered the body of the person -whether it is that of the father, grandfather or someone else...The wicked deeds of an ancestor can therefore ruin the life of a person.

Both the correct determination of the causes of misfortune and their treatment is embedded in a social network which connects family members, neighbours, and various specialists belonging to different castes. The scope of this paper precludes any detailed treatment of this sociologic aspect (see Tarabout, 1994), but it should be kept in mind that relationships are by no means simple:

- some astrologers will themselves practice an exorcism if needed, or may address the consultant to different other specialists: *mantravādi*, *pūjāri*, divine oracle, medical doctor (ayurvedic, allopathic, etc.), or psychiatrist;
- "foul play" (witchcraft) can be suspected from the part of close family members, but quite often the accusation is directed against other relatives, so that lines of tension and "enmity" are subtly interwoven with lines of solidarity and are part of dynamic processes by which bonds are redefined;
- people will approach a *mantravādi* on his reputation,⁵ and for this the religious identity is no bar -Hindu, Muslim and Christian consultants will make use of (in their own ways) of Hindu, Muslim and Christian practitioners without distinction. This, and the preceding remarks, suggests that representations of misfortune may not be necessarily the same for all the actors concerned, though there is a common pragmatic element.

/p.654/

1.2. A Typology of Occult Sources of Affliction

Occult aggressions are among the causes of misfortune; witchcraft, as we shall see now, is only one type of occult aggression. Let us use as a frame a typology found in a book of astrology, the *praśnamārggam*, commonly used in Kerala.⁶ It contains eleven sources of misfortune, which I will summarize and comment upon in line with this paper's perspective.

In six cases misfortune is the result of certain beings' anger (*kōpam*) aroused by one's offense, usually some form of disregard (lack of respect, insufficient offerings, pollution). The beings can be a god(dess), the family deity, serpents, ancestors (*pitṛ*), the guru, or brahmins -the first four being able to affect the person through possession⁷(not their only way of action). The remedy consists usually in satisfying their demands through a proper display of respect, offerings and gifts, or through various forms of expiation.

In the case of unappeased hovering spirits (*prētam*), both anger and strong desire can be at play. It is worth quoting here an example given by Asan:

We know that people commit suicide because of intense feelings of despair and indignation. On such occasions, when death is about to occur, several thoughts and feelings will make appearance in the mind (*manas*) of the individual but the next moment the man dies. The thoughts and feelings agitating the mind of the dying man then make rapport with his soul (*ātmāvu*). For instance suppose a man in inimical terms with another commits suicide with the aim of teaching the latter a lesson. On such occasions the intense desire to take revenge on the opponent will be haunting the thoughts of the former at the time of his death. The soul of the dying man will then keep the thoughts alive with it...It is in consequence of these things that diseases make appearance in the body of the opponent.

The cure in such a case will be to propitiate the *prētam*, either by ritually transforming him into a *pitṛ* so that it joins the world of appeased spirits (*pitṛlōkam*) or in some cases by consecrating it as a *bhūta* with a cult. In some occurrences the *prētam* can be made to be "imprisoned" in an outside place, for instance nailed in a tree.

The four last sources of misfortune enumerated in the *praśnamārggam* are:

- malevolent effect of planets: some planets, or some astrological conjunctions, are evil or inauspicious by themselves. Caution and rituals are both indicated.

- evil eye (*dṛṣṭi*). Here the scholarly classification of the *praśnamārggam* seems to be at variance with more common views. The treatise puts under this heading the effect of various invisible beings, *rakṣassu*, *bhūtam*, *ghandharvvan*, *yakṣi*, etc. Popularly there /p.655/ is a distinction. The evil eye proper (*karimkaṇṇu*, "black eye", as there is also *karinākku*, "black tongue") is a power which leaks out -sometimes quite involuntarily- from some persons when they show admiration (indicating potential desire) for something or somebody, provoking its subsequent demise;⁸ quite akin is the effect of *koti*, the look of envy (for food). *Bhūtas*, etc., on the other hand, are said to be similar in many respects with unappeased dead, *prētam*, acting likewise out of dissatisfaction, anger or desire.⁹ The remedy will be to offer them a cult, to subdue them through a more powerful being, or to expel (and "imprison") them.

- voluntary poisoning (*kaiviṣam*), and the action of the "enemy" (*śatru*): both the "poisoning" and the action of the enemy are done through the help of mantras. The action of the enemy is termed *abhicāram* [omitted in the published version: ("black magic"), or *kṣudrakarmmam* (foul act), *maraṇam* (killing), *mārrumaraṇam*] (treacherous killing).¹⁰ These sources of affliction are not exclusive of the precedent ones, since through witchcraft a *bhūta* can be sent to possess someone, or disputes with family elders can be created. Whether the enemy has acted by himself or has asked the help of a *mantravādi*, his motives are said to be based on envy, jealousy or desire, or on hatred. This is typically the accuser's discourse on the "other" (compare Favret-Saada 1977, where this point is particularly well worked-out). Constructing a demonized other is necessary in counter-witchcraft's rhetoric but this discourse conveniently forgets, and *needs* to forget, that the "victim" consulting a *mantravādi* out of despair can in turn be seen by others as an "enemy" (with all his characteristics): the envy and hatred attributed to an "enemy" is like the inversed image of the "victim's" own feelings of fear and despair.

Whatever the source of trouble the above list concurs with all oral statements to show that wrath, hatred, jealousy, greed, envy, and sexual desire, are said to be motivating visible and invisible beings to interfere in the life of people with disastrous results. If misfortune is presented at this level of explanation as a disruptive intrusion of others' passions into one's own life, effects will vary with circumstances or the victim's nature. Let us examine this aspect.

1.3. The victim

People are said to be endowed with various degrees of *manaśakti*, a term which English-speaking Malayalis will translate as "mind-power", "spiritual-power" or "will-power". *Manas* is defined by Asan as a "peculiar sense organ (*indriyam*)...very powerful. The activities of /p.656/ the five sense organs namely the eye, the ear, etc., depend on that of the mind". Note here that the word for "sense organ", *indriyam*, may also mean "passion", "male power" and "bodily strength". Passion is seen as a perturbation of the sense organs -leading to possible hallucinations or improper behaviour- as well as the source of activity -therefore also a sign of bodily strength. But the mind, though defined here as an "*indriyam*", is able to react against potential maladjustment. As Asan puts it, "the mind can create suspicion and also dispel it". Therefore people lacking of mind-power (as, for instance, young girls) will be more prone to occult attacks whereas people with strong mind-power are nearly immune from them. There are circumstances which will facilitate occult aggressions. In Asan's words:

"Suppose a man is walking along a lonely path in the dead hours of night and suppose he is stricken with terror on hearing a strange sound at a particular place where previously a person had committed suicide. Whatever the man does thereafter may be an imitation of the dead. This is due to the mental shock he has suffered from...It is to be understood that till the evil spirit is expelled from the body of the person, every act he performs will be in imitation of that of the spirit. Even the tone of his voice will be like that of the person when the spirit has entered his body".

Excessive grief provides also good opportunities for dead spirits to penetrate a victim and take possession of his/her faculties. We find such a situation in a case described by Dr. R. Jagathambika (1968: 77ff.): Kamala, a young housewife, reported to the author's psychological consultation complaining of being possessed by her aunt Laila; according to the narrative worked out by the patient while "possessed", the possession first took place when Kamala saw the dead body of her aunt and shrieked aloud, continuously sobbing "as if her heart would break...I made use of this opportunity to enter her body ("Laila" speaking)". Fear and excessive grief are emotions characteristics of a lack of will-power. Sense-organs are affected and one's faculties are no longer one's owns. Yet even the most strong-willed person can get into trouble: remember how in literature Kali is able to enter king Nala's body through a tiny impure spot on his heel! Breach of one's ritual purity opens a way for any potential occult aggression.

This, then, is the first part of the discourse about occult sources of misfortune. Anger, desire, and other passions of invisible or visible beings cause afflictions and much more so in weak-minded people who show fear or grief. Once misfortune is present, what can be done? Remedies will vary according to the cause identified. In case an "enemy" is involved, various courses are open: chanting a protective mantra (as the *gāyatri mantram* for brahmins), putting oneself under /p.657/ the protection of a powerful and benevolent god (offerings, vows, etc.), or asking a specialist to elaborate charms, to perform an exorcism, or to practice counter-witchcraft. Then the *mantravādi* comes into the limelight.¹¹ Let us examine how Asan describes the qualities of a good *mantravādi*.

2. THE MANTRAVĀDI AND HIS ACTIONS THROUGH HIS OWN EYES

2.1. The mantravādi

A *mantravādi* possesses a strong will-power by virtue of three complementary factors:

- a hereditary transmission within a family;
- a personal link to a guru (often the father), since book-studying without oral guidance leads only to disasters:¹²

"Nobody can learn witchcraft without undergoing oral coaching under a master. Only then his magic powers will yield fruitful results. If a magician violates these instructions he may find himself unable to control cruel deities (*durmūrtikaḷ*) when the theories are translated into practice and the possibility of the cruel deities turning against him cannot also be ruled out".

- courage to go through the dangers of this particular training. The training itself can be defined as "tantric", combining meditation on a chosen deity while repeating mantras (*mantrajapadhyānam*) with other techniques (*nyāsam*, *amganyāsam*, *prāṇāyāmam*, etc.), "which would convert him [the initiate] into a divine person...as a result of concentration of mind on a particular object a strange power emanates within the mind. The chanting of mantras converts this strange power into a divine one". This is done during a period of ascetic life (*tapassu*) and leads the initiate to gain control over the divine (*dēvatasiddhi*).

"If a person is prepared to concentrate his mind and thoughts with single-minded devotion on the deity *yakṣinī*, and meditate chanting the *yakṣinī-mantram* the prescribed number of times, *yakṣinī* will definitely manifest before him. She will further execute whatever the devotee commands. If an assignment is given to *yakṣinī* to inflict harm on a particular individual born in the house of a particular star, the command is bound to be executed. Similarly there is *cāttansēva*. *Cāttansēva* means pleasing Cāttan and thereby getting control over him. Strict austerities for a period of about 2 or 3 *maṇḍalam* [periods of 41 days] are to be observed to win the favours of Cāttan. As a result of the chanting of mantras with the attendant rituals one will achieve a state of inner purity. This purity will be perceivable only to the five sensory organs of the person concerned. Others cannot have any idea about it. Cāttan actually manifests before the person who wins his favour. He can see Cāttan when his mind is concentrated in meditation. In case the person who wins mastery **/p.658/** over Cāttan sends him on a mission of inflicting harm on a person or bringing a person before its master Cāttan will obey the commands".

Note here the ambiguity regarding authority in the relationship between the god and his devotee: through single-minded *service* one is able to *control* the god (see the specific discussion in Tarabout, 1997). Note also how inner purity as a sign of spiritual achievement is echoing impurity's importance in misfortune. Such a purity can be achieved only as a result of courage, since the entire undertaking is fraught with danger:

"It is courage that enables one to acquire absolute control over mantras. While in meditation in a lonely place, one may hear various sounds. He may also see various things in the vision of his mind. The man in meditation succeeds in propitiating a particular god because he is able to concentrate his

mind in meditation unmindful of the distracting sounds and sights. If he becomes nervous, his attempt will end in failure. If he loses self-confidence in the attempt of joining with the deity through meditation, there is every possibility of his becoming a victim to insanity (*bhrāntasvābhāvam*). Several persons have become insane thus".

The initiation period is thus a time when the disciple can well become a victim if he shows a weak mind. The aspiring *mantravādi* puts himself in the situation of becoming a potential prey to evil forces: for someone with such an assumption, great courage is required to undertake such a confrontation voluntarily. Fortunately for the practitioner, "an evil spirit can do little harm against a person having strong will-power. It is mental power that enables a person to acquire the knowledge of executing *abhicāram*, and also the knowledge of eliminating the effects of *abhicāram*". Having subdued his sense-organs and his own passions by developing the power within the mind through proper rituals, the *mantravādi* emerges transformed from his trials as a true hero.

Needless to say this heroic stand is diversely appreciated by other people, and many specialists will be branded as greedy -though perhaps dangerous- crooks (Unni Nayar 1952). Quite often a *mantravādi* will be accused of being the very same man who sends the troubles and who removes them. According to Asan, this is a perversion of *mantravādādam* which should be used only to protect people against [omitted in the published version: evil powers, and should not be directed against other] human beings. This rather theoretical position is made possible by the very logic of witchcraft's modes of action.

2.2. A *mantravādi*'s modes of action

From the realm of whirling passions in which the victim is trapped we come now to a level of rationalized adjustments (within these representations) and practical decisions. There, passions are attributes /p.659/ of deities, mere tools in the hand of the *mantravādi* who puts his mind-power into practice. This practical dimension is stressed by the very vocabulary of his interventions: *karmmam* (action, ceremony), *kriya* (act, ritual), *kṛtya* (prescribed act, witchcraft), *prayōgam* (application, manipulation). The discussion will be limited to a rhetorical typology exposed by Asan.

Within witchcraft (*abhicāram*), he distinguishes the Eight Acts (*aṣṭakarmmankaḷ*):¹⁴

- immobilisation (*stambhanam*);
- enchantment (*mōhanam*);
- demolition (*bhēdanam*);
- enmity (*vidvēṣaṇam*);
- attraction (*ākaraṣaṇam*);
- conquest, seduction (*vaśīkaraṇam*);
- expulsion (*uccāṭanam*);
- breaking (*oṭi*) -the most dreadful.¹⁵

As an example, here is a description of Immobilisation, *stambhanam*:

"The person against whom *stambhanam* is performed immediately loses his power of speech. The victim can be dispossessed of any faculty according to the wizard's desires. Suppose the opponent is a trader. As a result of *stambhanam* the trader may lose interest in his business and eventually the business may come to a standstill. In the case of an industrialist the persons who cooperate with him in his venture may quarrel with him and cease cooperating with him with the result that the industry will perish eventually...It can be seen thus that by employing Immobilisation the functioning of any faculty can be impaired".

The list of actions is itself pragmatically oriented. After recalling that the nature of deities and *bhūtas* varies according to its proportion of *sattvam* (clarity, serenity -examples given are Śrī Laksmī, Parvatī, and Sarasvatī), *rājasam* (activity) or *tāmasam* (darkness),¹⁶ Asan explains:

"It is the purpose that determines which deity or *bhūta* is to be employed. Suppose the purpose is Seduction (*vaśīkaraṇam*). Then deities with sattvik qualities only are employed. If the purpose is Immobilisation or Expulsion, the deities with high destructive powers (*ugraśakti dēvatakaḷ*) are engaged to achieve the desired results. But deities with sattvik qualities should not be utilised for the above purposes. But a deity with sattvik qualities can be directed against another one with destructive powers with the intention of seducing the latter. In case the attempt to seduce the deity fails, then Immobilisation could be employed. Or Expulsion could be employed. In fact the various acts of witchcraft are meant to be employed against destructive elements only. In other words they are not intended to be used against human beings. But men violate these principles actuated by selfish motives."

The *mantravādi* appears here as a tactician selecting deities to be employed according to their specific "quality" and the nature of the /p.660/ target. The "qualities" concerned are numerous, but the tactics employed show that there is a choice between two main strategies: either "seduce" the adverse power, or confront it with various degrees in violence. In other words the deities employed should be either desirable or capable of anger. The picture could certainly be refined but basically the tactics of witchcraft, according to its rhetoric, rely on the planned use of deities according to the desire or anger they are able to display: because of their functional use, these deities can be seen as the passions incarnates.

2.3. Passions in the rhetoric of witchcraft

Three actors are supposed to be necessary in witchcraft's drama. The aggressor, as he appears in the victim's narrative, acts out of passion: his violence is a sign of foulness, not of weakness, his force being a bodily one equated for this very reason with passion (and the lack of balance on the part of the sense organs). The victim, whose narrative is full of his own goodness or/and weakness, has an opposite maladjustment of the sense organs: stricken by fear or grief, potentially prone to hallucinations, he is usually presented (by others) as lacking mind-power (though he might admit, if he refers to *karma*, that his past misdeeds or those of ancestors were indeed performed at that time out of passion). Passions in both these cases are therefore used in two ways: as an explication of misfortune, and as a sign of maladjustment of the sense organs (a bodily

realisation of misfortune). As F. Zimmermann (1991: 191) indicates about the Ayurvedic tradition, "the theory of passions operates at two levels, that of Passion (singular) as a fundamental principle of delusion and misdeed in human existence, and that of the (various) passions or psychic diseases resulting from misdeeds".

The third actor, the *mantravādi*, stands apart (according to his perspective): thoroughly transformed by his tantric initiation he is an ordinary person no more. In contrast to the victim, he has a strong mind-power. In contrast to the aggressor, his passions are stored within himself in true ascetic fashion. Mastering his sense organs, in full possession of himself -not unlike the ideal good king (compare Malamoud 1992)- he is not involved in the problematic that involves the other two actors: beyond the explicative and symptomatic levels, passions have become for him an operative tool. By his acquired capacity and through proper rituals he is now able to play with passionate deities in a strategic game against the "other".

Witchcraft, as a symbolic system, is clearly a contest in strength: the "victim", defective in strength, is attacked by an "enemy" full of **/p.661/** strength, and asks the help of a powerful *mantravādi* in order to redress the lack of balance (Favret-Saada 1977). This works as long as the discourse on the defensive pair "victim"-(good) *mantravādi* is kept separate from the discourse on the offensive pair "enemy"-(bad) *mantravādi*, their possible physical identity being a blank point of this rhetoric. But there is more to be found in the statements we have seen, however theoretical (and *mantravādi*-biased) they may sound. A decisive shift is made in the discourse when passions, hitherto a tool to understand the world (giving both a "meaning" to misfortune and a bodily image of it), become a tool to operate on the world at will. Consultants need not know in details the relationships among the passions (though they have usually at least a faint idea about will-power), nor do they usually know about the technicalities of the modes of action of the *mantravādi*. But for the *mantravādi* the shift in the *rôle* of the passions is essential, and echoes at the rhetorical level his own initiatic transformation when he gets out of the troubled waters of bodily passions and claims control over them (claiming in the same moment control over passionate deities). As a mode of rationalizing (or "pragmatizing") away emotions such a rhetoric is at one and the same time a necessary theoretical background for the initiate's training, and an integral part of his mutation's process by providing him a firm intellectual grip on passions.

NOTES

1. Fieldwork for this essay was mostly done in 1991. I would like to express my thanks to Professor V.I. Subramoniam and to the members of the International School of Dravidian Linguistics, whose support has been constant throughout the years. I also would like to acknowledge the boundless help of my friends N. Rajasekharan Nair and L.S. Rajagopalan, as well as the courteous welcome extended to me by all the specialists who had to bear with my questions.
2. The distinction between witch and sorcerer is also criticized by Lewis (1986: 11) and Favret-Saada (1977: 27). For an ethnology and a discussion of sorcery/witchcraft in Kerala, see Tarabout (1994).
3. This use is fairly widespread in India. See, for instance, Sharma (1973), Babb (1983), Nichter (1992).
4. See Carstairs and Kapur (1976), Daniel (1983), Hiebert (1983), Sharma (1973), Nuckolls (1981), Nichter (1992). This interpretation of *karma* need not be linked to specific "low-caste beliefs" -as suggested for instance by Kolenda (1964) or Vincentnathan (1993)- since it was found to be widely expressed in Kerala, including by a tamil brahmin astrologer of Trichur.

5. Compare Kakar (1982: 39): "The belief that it is the person of the healer and not his conceptual system or his particular techniques that are of decisive importance for the healing process is also an unquestioned article of faith for most Indian patients". The author stresses the importance of confidence, as did all the people interviewed in Kerala.

/p.662/

6. See Govindan (1987). The section concerned is the 15th. An English translation has been published by B. Venkata Raman, Bangalore, IBH Prakashana.

7. Ancestors are sometimes said to possess somebody out of love for him/her. See, for instance, Jagathambika (1968: 52ff, 94ff).

8. See Panikkar (1918) and also, for Gujarat, Pocock (1973).

9. More on the *bhūtas* of Kerala in Tarabout (1986, 1992).

10. For a textual analysis on *abhicāram*, see Türstig (1985).

11. The role of a *mantravādi* is not of course limited to counter-witchcraft, but may also consist of putting chances on the good side: consultants may ask to succeed in business, get first rank in an exam, beget children, etc., without implying explicitly a previous hindrance from "enemies" or any nuisance to be sent against others. However in this paper the discussion is restricted to contexts in which an "enemy" is presupposed -since the capacity to confront such situations defines a *mantravādi*'s power.

12. The ultimate textual reference is of course the Atharva Veda, but commonly used manuals are tantric ones (see a list in Padmanabha Menon 1937: 215). Cheap booklets about "do-it-yourself" witchcraft can be easily found with street-sellers or in temple fairs' book-shops.

13. Cāttan is a well-known deity whose pranks range from polluting food and drinking-water to stone-throwing on roofs, or burning hay or clothes. The god is always supposed to be sent by an enemy. Nowadays a few of his sanctuaries between Trichur and Triprayar are experiencing a "boom", with consultants for protection or success coming from the four southern States (or, in the case of emigrants, from Bombay or the Gulf). Kottarattil Sankunni (1974) has given the foundation story of one of these shrines. There are many -but usually short- references to Cāttan in the anthropological literature: Fawcett (1915), Ananthakrishna Iyer (1969: I-70ff), Panikkar (1918), Thaliath (1956), Gough (1958), Kapur (1983: 76ff). One of the liveliest description is by Krishna Ayyar (1928). For more recent and in-depth studies, see Parpola (1999) about the god's iconography, Freeman (1991) for an account and an analysis of the god's importance in North Kerala, and Tarabout (1992, 1994, 1997).

14. Various published lists differ from this one in the number -and sometimes the meaning- of the Acts. Compare for instance Türstig (1985), Padmanabha Menon (1937: 207), Mariadassou (1937: 21-29).

15. On *oṭi* see Fawcett (1915), Ananthakrishna Iyer (1969: I-77ff), Unni Nayar (1952: 65ff), Kapur (1983: 19ff), and Mohan (1981).

16. Classifications may vary. The ternary one is based on the *guṇa* theory, but we find also a binary opposition between "pure form", *satmūrti*, and "cruel form", *durmūrti* (see, for instance, Fawcett 1915). *Bhūtas* are also classified according to which divinity they follow: Viṣṇu, Śiva, the Goddess, and for some informants Ayyappan.

REFERENCES

- Ananthakrishna Iyer, L.K., 1969, *The Cochin Tribes and Castes* (2 vol.). New-York: Johnson Reprint Corp. (1st ed. Madras 1909-12: Higginbotham/Govt. of Cochin).
- Babb, Lawrence A., 1983, "Destiny and Responsibility: Karma in Popular Hinduism", in C.F.Keyes and E.V.Daniel (eds.), *Karma. An Anthropological Inquiry*: 163-181. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Carstairs, G.M. and Kapur, R.L., 1976, *The Great Universe of Kota. Stress, Change and Mental Disorder in an Indian Village*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

/p.663/

Daniel, E. Valentine, 1983, "Conclusion: Karma, the Uses of an Idea", in C.F.Keyes and E.V.Daniel (eds.), *Karma. An Anthropological Inquiry*: 287-300. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Favret-Saada, Jeanne, 1977, *Les mots, la mort, les sorts. La sorcellerie dans le Bocage*. Paris: Gallimard, Bibl. des Sciences Humaines.

Fawcett, F., 1915, "Nayars of Malabar", *Madras Govt Museum Bulletin*, III-3 (1st print 1901).

Freeman, John R., 1991, *Purity and Violence: Sacred Power in the Teyyam Worship of Malabar*. University of Pennsylvania (Ph.D. Dissertation).

Goudriaan, Teun, 1978, *Mâyâ Divine and Human. A Study of Magic and Its Religious Foundations in Sanskrit Texts, with Particular Attention to a Fragment on Visnu's Mâyâ Preserved in Bali*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Gough, E. Kathleen, 1958, "Cults of the Dead Among the Nayars", *Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 71, n281: 446-78.

Govindan, Krishnalayam M.K., 1987, *Praśnamārggam (pūrvvārdham)*. Kottayam: N.B.S.

Hiebert, Paul G., 1983, "Karma and Other Explanation Traditions in a South Indian Village", in C.F.Keyes and E.V.Daniel (eds.), *Karma. An Anthropological Inquiry*: 119-130. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Jagathambika, R., 1968, *A Case Study of Multiple Personality or Possession-syndrome. Its Aetiology and Treatment*. Alwaye: Union Christian College (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis).

Kakar, Sudhir, 1982, *Shamans, Mystics and Doctors. A Psychological Inquiry into India and Its Healing Traditions*. New-York: Knopf Publ.

Kapur, Sohaila, 1983, *Witchcraft in Western India*. Bombay: Orient Longman.

Kolenda, Pauline, 1964, "Religious anxiety and Hindu fate", *Journal of Asian Studies* 23: 71-82.

Kottarattil Sankunni, 1974, *Aitihyamāla*. Kottayam: Kottarattil Sankunni Memorial Committee (1st publ.: 1909-1934).

Krishna Ayyar, K.V., 1928, "Chathan: a Devil or Disease?", *Man*, 28: 151-3.

Lewis, I.M., 1986, *Religion in Context. Cults and Charisma*. Cambridge University Press.

Lynch, Owen M., 1990, "The Social Construction of Emotion in India", in O.M.Lynch (ed.), *Divine Passions. The Social Construction of Emotion in India*: 3-34. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Malamoud, Charles, 1992, « La colère et le désir dans le système des passions royales de l'Inde ancienne », *Psychiatrie française*, XXIII: 8-14.

Mariadassou, P., 1937, *Médecine traditionnelle de l'Inde: la magie noire*. Pondichéry: the author.

Mohan, Lakshmi, 1981, "Voodoo and Black Magic. Exorcism in the backwaters of Kerala", *The India Magazine*, 6 (May 1981): 52-60.

Nichter, Mark, 1992, "Of Ticks, Kings, Spirits, and the Promise of Vaccines", in C.Leslie and A.Young (eds.), *Paths to Asian Medical Knowledge*: 224-53. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Nuckolls, Charles W., 1981, "Interpretations of the Concept of Karma in a Telugu Fishing Village", *The Eastern Anthropologist*, 34-2: 95-106.

Obeyesekere, Gananath, 1975, "Sorcery, Premeditated Murder, and the Canalization of Aggression in Sri Lanka", *Ethnology*, 14-1: 1-23.

Padmanabha Menon, K.P., 1937, *History of Kerala, vol. IV*. Ernakulam: Cochin Government Press (Reprint 1986, New Delhi, Asian Educational Services).

Pandya, Mukul, 1982, "Occultism in an Urban Community", *The Eastern Anthropologist*, 35-4: 319-322.

Panikkar, K.M., 1918, "Some Aspects of Nayar Life", *JRAI*, 48: 254-93.

/p.664/

- Parpola, Asko, 1999, "The Iconography and Cult of Kuṭṭicāttan: Field Research on the Sanskritization of Local Folk Deities in Kerala", in J.Bronkhorst and M.M.Deshpande (eds.), *Aryan and Non-Aryan in South Asia. Evidence, Interpretation and Ideology*: 175-205. Cambridge, MA, Harvard Oriental Series.
- Pocock, D.F., 1973, *Mind, Body and Wealth. A Study of Belief and Practice in an Indian Village*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Sharma, Ursula, 1973, "Theodicy and the Doctrine of Karma", *Man* N.S. 8-3: 347-364.
- Tarabout, Gilles, 1986, *Sacrifier et donner voir en pays malabar. Les fêtes de temple au Kérala (Inde du Sud): étude anthropologique*. Paris: E.F.E.O., vol. 147.
- Tarabout, Gilles, 1992, « Quand les dieux s'emmêlent. Point de vue sur les classifications divines au Kérala », in V.Bouillier and G.Toffin (eds.), *Classer les Dieux? Des panthéons en Asie du Sud*. Paris: E.H.E.S.S. (Purusartha 15).
- Tarabout, Gilles, 1993, « Violence et non-violence magiques: la sorcellerie au Kérala », in Meyer, Tarabout and Vidal (eds.), *Violences et non-violences en Inde*. Paris: E.H.E.S.S. (Purusartha 16).
- Tarabout, Gilles, 1997, "Maîtres et serviteurs. Commander à des dieux au Kérala », in A. de Surgy (ed.), *Religion et pratiques de puissance* : 253-284. Paris : L'Harmattan.
- Thaliath, Joseph, 1956, "Notes on Some Pulaya Customs and Beliefs", *Anthropos*, 51: 1029-54.
- Türstig, Hans-Georg, 1985, "The Indian Sorcery Called Abhicāra", *WZKS*, XXIX: 69-117.
- Unni Nayar, M.K., 1952, *My Malabar*. Bombay: Hind Kitabs Ltd.
- Vincentnathan, Lynn, 1993, "Untouchable concepts of person and society", *C.I.S.* (N.S.), 27-1: 53-82.
- Zimmermann, Francis, 1991, "The Love-Lorn Consumptive: South Asian Ethnography and the Psychosomatic Paradigm", *Curare* (Anthropologies of Medicine, Special Issue), 7/91: 185-195.