



Religious Endemic: Problematizing Theology and Marginality in Bengal's Hinduism

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Abstract

Ever since the Vedic period, the land of Bengal was considered outside the ambit of Vedic Culture. This provides the basis for the distinctiveness of the Bengali pantheon. Bengal was also considered a land of fever and endemics. Atharva Veda, from where Ayurveda takes its roots, holds a subsidiary position among the corpus of Vedic Literature. This paper is an attempt to trace the trajectory between the marginalized land and its marginalized deities. It aims at picking up selective incidents and examples within Ayurvedic and Hindu traditions to portray how endemic had been instrumental in some watershed movements in Hinduism and its offshoots in folk theology. With several examples ranging from Kali to Sitala, and from Manik Pir to Jwarasura, the paper relocates the caste question and the question of marginality in the light of iconographic and ritualistic observations.

Keywords: Endemic, Bengal, Ayurveda, Marginality, Sitala, Jwarasur, Kali.