Chapter 5

Reinventing Education: Consecrating Knowledge in Twentieth Century Keralam

Before we can learn, we need to learn how to learn, and before we can learn how to learn we need to unlearn

(A Sufi aphorism)

This chapter is in three sections. The first section addresses the discourse generated around modern education and the way communities responded to it and enriched it. An attempt is made to grasp the notion of vidya (something different from vidyabhyasam or education) that prevails in and circulates through different indigenous knowledge practices (For instance kalarividya, vishavidya (an aspect in vishavaidyam), cheppadividya etc.) that are subsumed within the space of modern education. In other words, the chapter makes an attempt to understand the idea of knowledge in a different context, and the relationship of an individual (subject) with the idea of knowledge (object). In order to achieve this, I look at the ideas and interventions of a few ‘religious’ and community leaders who lived during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

The second section delineates three significant moments in the twentieth century, which reflect the ambivalence in dividing a practice as vishavaidyam or ayurveda based on the expertise or vidya acquired through traditional learning. The first debate is about the confusion in continuing a grant-in-aid to a vishavaidyasala (pharmacy for treating toxic cases) when the practitioner began to treat general diseases too. He was a traditionally learnt nattuvaidyan and hence an expert in both general illness and poison cases. The second debate is around the
introduction of a Vishavaidya Board, in the 1970s, to conduct examinations and monitor the traditionally trained vishavaidyas. The attempt was met with fierce protests from the formally educated ayurveda students and the state was forced to postpone the results of the examination. The third moment describes the initiation of a public debate on vishavaidyam which happened in two phases. The first one was in 1970 between Dr. Adiyodi and Kuttykrishna Menon, a vishavaidyam. The second phase was a monologue initiated by Dr. Manoj Komath, a scientist in 2011. The attitude and accusations in both phases differ while the scientific basis of modern medicine in treating poison remained the same.

The third section describes the changes that occurred in the educational field of ayurveda, beginning from the early twentieth century onwards. There were moments of tension, confusion and excitement in incorporating knowledge from diverse nattuvaidyam, and institutionalizing an ayurveda. At a certain juncture, the patrons and the state were puzzled by the problems posed by the introduction of modern physiology, anatomy and surgery in ayurveda education, when the newly graduated practitioners chose to practice modern medicine. Then there was a retreat to shuddha (pure) ayurveda and the courses were designed accordingly. I argue that the changes that occurred in the realm of ayurveda education as well as the vishavaidyam certification hint at the gradual transformation of the existing notion of vidya to an emerging idea of vidyabhyasam or education. The call of the community leaders for reforming the rituals within community practices also reflects the shifting meaning of vidya tovidyabhyasam.
Section I

Learning Vs Education

In the twentieth century, the advent of modern education in India initiated explicit and implicit discussions on religion, knowledge, language and practices of the indigenous communities as well as those of the colonizers. Education became a buzz word that often stood in place of knowledge, though the concept of knowledge reflected in innumerable perspectives.\(^1\) While education represented knowledge or dissemination of knowledge, the indigenous mode of learning was classified in the official colonial documents under religious learning by making an invariable association with practice and belief. Thus, *vaidyam* (indigenous medical practice), *jyothisham* (astrology), *vasthusastram* (carpentry) or *vidya* (indigenous learning or indigenous education which included all the above mentioned categories) became classified as practices interwoven with rituals and religion\(^2\). The places where the learning process occurred and the mode of imparting learning were imperative in categorizing these practices under religious practices.\(^3\) Formal education brought in the idea of a divide between the formal and public place of ‘secular’ education and the informal and private place of

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\(^1\) National Knowledge Commission Report 2006. The report classifies traditional knowledge in the knowledge application category and education under knowledge production category. This differential treatment delegitimises certain systems of knowledge production by situating them outside the purview and norms of education. The UNESCO World Report on ‘Towards Knowledge Society’ contradicts the above position by defining knowledge society as “a society that is nurtured by its diversity and its capacities,” 17.

\(^2\) See the Census Report of Madras Presidency, 1891, 1901 and 1911. The corresponding Census Report of Cochin and Travancore princely states did not categorize any of the mentioned practices under religion. Though these practices were classified under occupation in these early Census Reports, gradually they were shifted under religion. See the Census Report of Cochin and Travancore from 1921 onwards.

\(^3\) Most of the practices were taught by a single teacher (guru) who specialized in the subject. In the eighteenth century the indigenous schools were classified as *salas* for Brahmns, *patasalas* or *pallikudams* or *ezhuthupallis* for other castes and *muktabs* and *madrassas* for Muslims. All of these institutions, irrespective of their different nature and diverse subjects taught, were classified as those imparting religious education as they also taught about life and living. (See Ghosh 1995).
‘religious’ learning. Udaya Kumar pithily represents this as “Janam or ‘people’ being transformed into pothujanam or the ‘public’ through a process of address and education.” (Kumar 2007, 413-441). However, informal spaces of learning often evaded the governing process of the state, designed their own norms, informal curriculum and disciplining which were mediated through caste hierarchy.

With the proliferation of modern education in the nineteenth century, a feeling of lack permeated the (public and private) life worlds of the people. As a response to this lack, communities initiated reforms of various customs, internal to their practices to make them acceptable to the larger social world. The leaders and spiritual figures exhorted their communities to get educated and to eradicate many superstitious rituals (acharangal). Some of the ideas propagated for the cleansing went to the extent of terming the languages used to learn religious texts as degraded and calling for renovation of the languages themselves. I analyse a few important moments in these debates which were initiated by Makthi Thangal (1847-1912), Chattampi Swamikal (1853-1924), Sree Narayana Guru (1856-1928) and Ayyankali (1863-1941). All of these personalities were born in the

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4 Sana Ullah Makthi Thangal, a religious teacher from the Muslim community, raised the issue of superstitious customs and ajnanam (lack of knowledge), and also spoke vehemently against the missionaries.

5 Sree Vidyadhiraja Parama Bhattachara Chattambi Swamikal, a spiritual leader of the Nairs (sudras), a siddhavaidyan and a social reformer, also spoke fervently against religious conversions attempted by the missionaries.

6 Sree Narayana Guru was the spiritual leader who reformed many rituals or customs that existed within the lower castes in general and the Ezhavas in particular. He was also an indigenous vaidyan, but this knowledge was subsumed in his spiritual knowledge. When people were cured by Chattambi Swamikal or Narayana Guru, it was attributed to their divine powers rather than to their knowledge of indigenous medicine.

7 Ayyankali, a member of the legislative council of the Travancore state from 1912-1930 and a leader of the lower castes, led many struggles including labour strikes for asserting the educational rights of the lower castes who were denied entry into the newly emerging schools.
second half of the nineteenth century and lived through the early twentieth century.\(^8\)

**Contextualizing education**

Modern education became the central pillar in building up the idea of a better individual in terms of her capabilities and the world view she acquired through the attainment of education. The capabilities meant not only certain technical skills, but also included acquiring specific language/s, particular ways of understanding, speaking and behaving. Such capabilities positioned the individual in a particular way within the society and worked as a deciding component that shaped her relation to the self and with others. The referent, education, implied a plethora of things in different contexts. Many social activists have perceived\(^9\) it as a space that promised parity to people across castes and communities\(^10\). The concept of education has been studied in depth by many scholars within institutional, ideological, philosophical, developmental, political and sociological perspectives. It has been studied as an institutional apparatus with its constraints and possibilities on the basis of how the content, teaching and learning are perceived within an educational system (Kumar 2004). It has also been analysed on how the subjects were refashioned within the learning process (Seth 2007).

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\(^8\) One of the limitations of the study is that all the personalities mentioned above worked in southern and central Keralam – in the states of Travancore and Cochin. This restricts the revealing of the diversity of articulations of communities, especially from the northern part of Keralam that came under British Malabar. But given the lack of availability of sufficient material, this chapter limits its ambitions within the available resources.

\(^9\) The leaders of the lower caste movement (Ayyankali, Sahodaran Ayyappan, Poykail Yohannan etc.) perceived education as a weapon that would enhance the communities’ social status.

\(^10\) Ambedkar’s much quoted statement on education is as follows: “The backward classes have come to realize that after all education is the great material benefit for which they can fight. We may forego material benefits, we may forego material benefits of civilization, but we cannot forego our rights and opportunities to reap the benefit of the highest education to the fullest extent. That the importance of this question is from the point of view of the backward classes who have just realized that without education their existence is not safe” (See Ambedkar 1982, 62).
Some scholars have studied the educational crisis within a higher level of learning (Raina 2009, 87-90). The focus of these studies has remained varied, ranging from the knowledge that is disseminated, the spaces that imparted knowledge, the subjection process in education etc. The content of learning and teaching, or the form of learning is studied sometimes as an empowering tool (Sanal Mohan 2006, 5-40) and on other occasions as an ideological tool for implanting dominant views (Kumar 2004). The space that disseminates the knowledge or information is also viewed as one that provides parity as well as that produces new hierarchies (Satyanarayana 2002, 50-83). The referent always accommodates contradictory positions and possibilities.

In the process of redrawing the distinction (or rather association) between education and knowledge, the term education gained several significations and it has been revised and reconstituted many times. However, it stands equivalent to knowledge or as a system that produces and disseminates knowledge. Education was interpreted in numerous ways by administrative officials, ethnographers, missionaries and sociologists in the pre and post colonial period. It is well known that in the initial years of colonial rule, education was envisaged as a medium that inculcated knowledge (here it means arts and science) of the west to produce a group of people whose physique is Indian but their ideas European (Kumar 2004). This idea was justified by adding another component, the moral improvement of the natives (Kumar 2004, Seth 2007). The moral decline of the native was presumed by making associations between the actions and practices of the non-educated and their ideas, beliefs, and values and pointing out the inconsistencies in them (Seth 2007, 47-78). Practices and actions of individuals
were considered as expressions of their ideas, beliefs and values. Many of the missionaries also perceived education as having a mediating role in activating their ecumenical project of conversion (Kumar 2004). They saw the institutional space as well as the content of education as promoting religious conversion without coercion. The space is perceived as one that re-arranged coercive conversion with submission to Christianity through a process of continuous conscientization and socialization of the population (Kumar 2004). In short, modern education is implied to possess a disciplining technology envisioned on the uniformity of the people, whether it was by learning arts and science, moral improvement or the moral ideas of a Semitic religion.

After a few years of implementing the western ideas of education, \(^{11}\) the natives were criticised for using education for an instrumental purpose of getting jobs in the government institutions (Kumar 2004, Seth 2007). The learning process adopted by native students was also critiqued and dismissed as rote-learning devoid of an engagement with knowledge texts. While initiating modern education in India, the goals were already set by the officials and thinkers, and its failure too was assessed on the basis of the non-achievement of these already set goals. This discourse about the failure of education did not acknowledge the fact that the people had a different approach towards life, education and knowledge/vidya (Seth 2007). What had occurred simultaneously was that despite the disciplining and adaptation techniques, the natives had begun to apply ‘their reason’ for purposes which transcended instrumentalist motives (Seth 2007).

\(^{11}\) Both English education and the vernacular education imparted through the State and the Missionary-run schools.
Scholars have viewed education as a disciplining mechanism that integrated the natives smoothly with the governing process of the state, making them law-abiding subjects (Kumar 2004). But many of the native learners also got involved with the political movement against colonial rule. Thus they resisted to cater to the objective of creating law-abiding subjects (Kumar 2004). However, institutionalization of ‘knowledge’ was essential to improve the intelligibility of the subjects and to integrate them into the governing process through non-coercive methods such as disciplining and adaptation. In other words, education positioned people in particular ways in terms of their ability and capacity to use the potential of the new institutions of the modern technologies. Through the ordering of selected ideas or producing particular correlations, modern education further disciplined and positioned the bodies in particular ways (Foucault 1995). Education is further theorized as one that produced “a new kind of secular ethnicity blending the economic interests and concerns with cultural aspiration” (Kumar 2004, 42). It has been seen as a system of power/knowledge repositioning people as civilized or indigenous (Smith 1999, 1-37). Smith further argues that through the curriculum and its underlying theory of knowledge the early schools redefined the world and how the indigenous Maori people of New Zealand were positioned in it (Smith 1999, 1-37). By making a connection between both these concepts, the uneducated people were seen as not only illiterate, but also ignorant. Not being attuned to a particular mode of governance or an institutional apparatus was seen as the ignorance or resistance of the uneducated.

By the twentieth century, education was also seen as a tool to acquire or bargain for the liberal idea of equality. When the privileged groups utilise education as an
instrument to perpetuate their hegemony over the underprivileged community, the latter often takes recourse to educating themselves for acquiring self-respect and equality (Satyanarayana 2002, 50-83). Education, while strengthening group solidarity among the educated, disturbs the ‘traditional hierarchies’ (Kumar 2004). Studies also indicate that there is a lack of integration between education, employment and development (Swaminathan 2007, 325-358). It is seen as a tool to impart a sense of citizenship to an individual and a role in the nation-building endeavour (Aggarwal and Agrawal 1992, 62-173).\(^{12}\) By redefining the meaning of education and reconstituting the practices in it, contrasting and conflicting discourses were enabled.

In the late colonial period, the contrasting discursive visibility of education was revised, reconsidered and reconstituted again, by retaining certain ideas of the earlier century. Irrespective of the diverse meanings produced, all communities perceived education as a tool for attaining upward mobility and better social status. It has been pointed out that the equality of opportunities generated through education was seen as providing equal socio-political and economic benefits (Chaudhari and Chaudhari 2003). However, even though education became a desirable object for all communities, there has been disparity in the access to it for different communities, and this continues till today (Velaskar 2003, 332).

The public educational spaces hold the potential to enfold contradicting ideas of reaffirming caste as well as destabilizing caste hierarchy. Similarly, it promises parity, while allowing entry to all into the space and reformulating inequality in

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\(^{12}\) The Kothari commission formed in the post-independence scenario focused on national integration and progress in which education was a central component. It views education as a crucial factor in determining the level of prosperity, welfare and security of the people (Report of the Commission 1964-66).
multiple new ways. This includes keeping aloof from the culture and knowledge of a large group of people, disseminating particular ways of communication skills, using select languages as mode and medium of communication and constituting the space of institutions conducive to certain groups who are familiar to such spaces.

The high rates of literacy and education were seen as one of the significant parameters of the development of Keralam and this has attracted much attention from international and Indian development scholars (Parayil 2000). This idea of progress has, however, been critiqued by a number of scholars (Raman 2010).

Through the multi-faceted process of formal and informal educational interventions, institutional practices, policy formulations and the creation of discourses on development around it, education has developed certain unique characteristics and attributes. Almost all social groups nurture aspirations around education, for real or tangible benefits. It has become a desirable object and an ‘emancipatory tool’ for many marginalised groups (Chentharassery 1979). The missionary intervention and the later colonial intervention in the area of education are seen as instrumental in the liberation of lower castes from the caste oppression. The shift of the site from a single guru’s home to a seemingly public space (school) is seen as a spatial opening that allows entry for all communities.

What has been described by scholars as the earlier ‘liberal’ model (Kumar 2004, 13)

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13 The debates in the 1980’s and 90’s over the ‘Kerala Model of Development’ have emphasised the role of literacy and education along with health in the unique development pattern of the state. This is characterised by significant growth in the tertiary sector achieved in spite of the lack of growth in the primary and secondary sectors. It appeared to many that Keralam had subverted the conventional model of development in which progress in the productive sectors of industry and agriculture were regarded as the determining factors that should lead to corresponding progress in all other sectors. Subsequently, this theoretical perspective was critiqued by other scholars (See Raman 2010).
Seth 2007) of education and the present ‘developmental’ model seem to offer almost the same kind of promise. While the former model emphasised the humanistic aspects of education, with a focus on its values, moral elements and an ample share of citizenship, the latter offered the promise of a linear progress and upward mobility through education. Here, one can see a positional change in the idea of education from liberal to neo-liberal at par with the economic development of the world. Along with this development, the locus of education has shifted from the local, regional and national levels to the global level. This dissociation from the local context also increases the ‘secular value’ attributed to modern education.

In the post-colonial period, one of the main thrusts of the nation-state was in educating the masses of India. Here education symbolizes a new, civilized nation where nobody would be illiterate vis-à-vis ignorance. The combining of these two concepts indeed is a new phenomenon of the nineteenth century. Illiteracy was squarely linked to the new concept of literacy that was introduced during the early years of colonial rule. Illiteracy, a differential positioning produced through literacy was equated with ignorance. The pedagogic practice of modern education presupposes a literate community and the main endeavour in the schools, right from the primary classes, is to produce a literate group. Without having knowledge in reading and writing, one cannot proceed further on the ladder of modern education. Since the early nineteenth century, the relationship between script, reading and writing has completely changed by making an inseparable association between reading, writing and reasoning. Earlier, a person who knew how to read did not necessarily know the art of writing and there were specialists (scribes) to
perform writing. One could learn mathematics or vaidyam or jyothisham without being well-versed in writing. People could acquire a grasp in these subjects through reiteration and memorization. They could also transfer their knowledge or, rather, these techniques to their disciples or the next generation. Learning through keen observation, gradual participation, experimentation and initiation required years of labour. This was not seen as a waste of time since the idea of waste, and the idea of time as something that can be disposed off or used profitably was not prevalent. Native forms of learning provided basic training in several areas of practical knowledge including mathematics and medicine (Dharampal 1983). When these were transformed into modern education, it entailed uprooting of many components and replacement of some others. For instance, kalari as an educational space has changed into a place for learning and performing only kalarippayattu. Learning of vaidyam has been replaced in the modern educational space and deposed by introducing a new notion of hygiene. Each and every subject became a specialized field of knowledge. This process prioritizes reading and writing as prime components by combining both as inseparable elements of learning and reasoning. In other words, modern education initiated the formulation of a writing culture as it derived its ideas from “a culture characterized by written texts” (Frenz 2007, 74-99). This does not necessarily mean that prior to modern education there was an absence of writing culture. Writing and oral culture shared the same social space, interacted with each other, but did not initiate a clear hierarchy for the scribes or their expertise in writing.

Education and writing culture activates a self-gaze – a way of viewing, presenting and disciplining oneself for the society, and assigns an internality to an

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14 See my chapter 3 for the further effects produced with the introduction of literacy.
individual. This internality is constituted in a continuous relation with the other in the society. In acquiring *vidya*, the internality of an individual ends up in relating with or knowing the self and through that self one relates with the world or knows the world. The body is central in acquiring any knowledge/vidya and it acts as a door in attaining self-realization. There are a number of rituals in which the body is central, no matter whether it is a physical learning like *kalari* or non-physical learning. In *jyothisham* (astrology), *vaidyam* (medical practice), *asarippani* (carpentry) etc. the body of the practitioner has to maintain its sacredness through a number of rituals. The sacredness of the body was maintained by all the practitioners across castes, though there were differences in the rituals performed.

Modern education, one of the important components of ‘modernity’, acts as a hegemonic system working through a series of processes and introducing new rituals of rationalization. They include incorporating different and diverse knowledge systems into a centralised form of knowledge production and applying its own norms to other systems. This assimilation and erasure take place not through coercion, but through methods of incorporation, standardisation and categorisation. Of course, this need not amount to the total extinction of certain systems, but can result in significant transformations in form and essence. In short, the modes of transmission and the institutional set up that controls and monitors the process of education is non-separable from the knowledge transmitted.

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15 In *vaidyam*, there are strict restrictions and conditions for collecting certain herbs and plants. *Vaidyas* name this as *sutras* (tricks or techniques) and they say these conditions cannot be seen in all texts on *vaidyam*. In order to know these techniques or intricacies one has to learn *vaidyam* in a proper manner from an appropriate guru.
Responses from within

Despite the ideas of the exponents who established the educational institutions in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, education was interpreted diversely by the people of India who were the beneficiaries of this emerging institutional space. On the one hand, education is seen as a tool for progress and, on the other, as a symbol of progress. The increasing demands from different communities for an equal share in the educational space have to be seen in the context of the emerging relationship between the state, the citizen and the civil society and the internalization of the governmental process (Rabinow 1984, 102; Graham Burchell et al. 1991). The governmental process of imparting education through formal and informal educational institutions, policies and programmes has created a state-centred and education-centred mindset among the people.

In contrast to the history of education and the affiliation between Brahmins and colonial knowledge elsewhere in India (Kumar 2000, Kumar 2004), the the upper caste Nampoothiris, treated the space of education as polluting. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the lower castes aspired to access the educational space, seeing it as a tool to enhance their social status and to

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16 Foucault explains governmentality as an act of governing the self and others in the context of the new form of government that emerged in Europe in the eighteenth century. Population is the immediate target of this act. He explains the practices of institutions such as the prison and the clinic as sites of imparting governmental rationality of the state. Education, medical practices, census, railway, public works, technologies, communication media etc. produced and maintained the conditions of the governmental process (Rabinow 1984). One of the approaches in Foucault is that the government is concerned about men in their relations and links with other things such as a) wealth, resources, territory with its specific qualities, climate, fertility, irrigation etc. and b) customs, habits, ways of doing and thinking and c) accidents, famines, epidemics etc. (Graham Burchell et al. 1991).

17 Literacy programmes of the State Literacy Mission are implemented through informal spaces and through partially non-coercive methods of conscientization classes and wide advertisement through radio, dooradarsan, print and visual media.
destabilize the caste hierarchy (Chentharassery 1979, Sekhar 2012). The Muslims in Keralam also perceived the space as one that spreads knowledge which was not necessary for them. However, some of the other communities, mainly the sudras and the Christians, utilized the potential of education for meeting their instrumental requirements of getting jobs and consistent remuneration.

The upper caste Brahmins not only perceived the space as polluting, but also as one that disseminated unnecessary information instead of *jnanam* (knowledge). They restrained themselves from entering the space till the mid twentieth century (Bhattathiripad 1970, 5). When a variety of castes got access into the public space of education, their very presence restricted the Nampoothiris from accessing it. But, they did not bother much about the knowledge imparted through the educational space as they saw themselves as people who already possessed knowledge and certain privileges and positions as learned men. Thus the Kerala-Brahmins were reluctant to refashion themselves through education and were less interested in changing their social positions through it (Bhattathiripad 1970). This has been viewed as the backwardness of the Nampoothiri community as such. They aspired for a private space within the public space of education which was impossible to be attained in the initial years of implementation of modern education.

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18 For instance, the protests initiated by Ayyankali and Sahodaran Ayyappan for the right to enter into the school and get educated.
19 By the mid-twentieth century, due to the lack of access to employment in the governmental institutions, this community pushed themselves into the educational spaces. Initially they established special schools for the Nampoothiri boys and denied this space to their women. By the mid twentieth century, this space was open to Nampoothiri women also in order to reform them to the standard of their educated men (Bhattathiripadu 1970).
The Malayalee Memorial\textsuperscript{20} submitted to the Maharaja of Travancore in 1891 evidences the above mentioned history. It was both a protest and a request. The protest was against the excessive presence of outsiders, especially the \textit{paradesi} (outsiders/Tamil) Brahmins in government jobs, and the request was to appoint the educated natives in such posts. Though the memorandum was signed by different castes and communities, their protest was not against the Nampoothiris who had not yet emerged as a threat to the educated natives. For the lower caste people - the Ezhavas and the agricultural labourers - education was the stepping stone to a world of greater social equity whereas for sudras, both education and equity was already an achievable goal. The latter group was concerned more about acquiring jobs for themselves, in competition with the outside (Tamil) Brahmins. While the entry of the castes below the Ezhavas into the field of education produced an excess ‘public’ness for them, the Brahmins needed an aloofness from that very visibility. The Nairs and Ezhavas accepted the public space as well as the space of education as suited for their inhabitation as long as castes below them did not enter there to usurp the privileges they enjoyed. Such manifestation of power and control over knowledge, bodies, and public spaces exist in the interactions among the bodies and within the tension produced in their unequal relations. In the case of the castes below sudras, even when some of the members of these communities educated themselves in areas outside \textit{Malayalarajyam}\textsuperscript{21} such as Madras or Calcutta, they did not get acceptance or

\textsuperscript{20} The memorandum submitted to Sri Mulam Thirunal Raja of Travancore, on 1st January, 1891, demanding privileges and positions in the government sectors bear the signatures of over 10,000 people, including a sprinkling of Ezhavas, Christians and Muslims.

\textsuperscript{21} Before the establishment of the political boundaries of Kerala, the area was termed as Malayanma and Malayalarajyam, which characterizes a sort of loose linguistic identity. Raju argues that Chattambi swamikal, used the term \textit{Malayalarajyam} for representing a region with its linguistic identity (Raju 1999).
respect within Keralam, especially in the Travancore and Cochin region. They did not get any government jobs within Keralam even in the late nineteenth century. This led to the submission of the Ezhava Memorial to the Raja in 1896. The demand in the memorial was to post educated Ezhavas in the government services. The Malayalee Memorial signed by some Ezhavas five years before had not brought any benefit to them. Discussions about the future of the educated youths during that period turned into a demand for acquiring possible government jobs. The education acquired through government institutions and government supported institutions generated aspirations of staying back in the governmental spaces of employment. It can be observed now that the governmental process of imparting education through formal and informal educational institutions, policies and programmes has created a state-centred and education-centred mindset among the people of Keralam.

It is notable that the first labour protest organized by Ayyankali in Keralam that lasted for a year was for not merely for a wage hike. It was also for the right to education of the *pulaya* caste or agricultural labourers (Chentharassery 1979, 62-98). It is an interesting contradiction that when the untouchable castes agitated for the right to education as well as the right to enter such public spaces, the upper caste Brahminis (the nampoothiris) kept themselves aloof from the public education space, scared of being polluted by the bodies of the others.

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22 Dr. Palpu, the first Ezhava biomedical doctor who had graduated from Madras Presidency, had written a series of essays in *Vivekodayam* Daily lamenting about the pathetic conditions of the educated among Ezhava. Dr. Palpu and his educated brother Velayudhan, did not get a job in Keralam during their entire career (Panthathala 2001).

23 Ayyankali, a leader who stood for the rights of the downtrodden castes from the Travancore state, had organised a labour strike of the agricultural labourers in 1913 demanding wage hike, the right to travel in public spaces and the right to enter public schools. The protesters refrained from agricultural work for about one year. The financial losses suffered by them were partially met by engaging them in fishing work with the support of the fishing community.
Discourse on reading

From the very beginning, the Muslim community in Keralam had been forced to struggle against campaigns which treated them as fanatics, superstitious and uneducated people. Primarily as a response to the missionaries’ adverse representation of Muslims, and their attempts to convert to Christianity the people of Keralam, Makthi Thangal urged the Muslims to study Malayalam and Tamil as a precondition for religious learning in Arabi-Malayalam (Kareem 1981, 437-448). He insisted on the need for formal schooling for the Muslims and emphasized the learning of Tamil and Malayalam. Nevertheless, he was critiqued by his own community and supported by the ‘Hindus’ in his endeavour to reform Muslims. Gangadharan, in his introduction to Thangal’s collection of works, establishes the reformist attempt of Thangal by stating that though some other Muslims were known for their reformist work, they did not spread their ideas through writings and preaching. The emphasis given to writing and preaching, two new actions or modern rituals that gained more visibility in the nineteenth century was considered as the prime measure of any social action as a reformist attempt. Thangal reproduced his article written in Malayalam to English as he wanted to see his community reformed (parishkritham). Does parishkritham only mean reform or improvement or something else? When Thangal uses the word parishkaaram, it does not simply mean the reformation of an existing state

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24 Thangal was an employee in the Excise Department of the British government for a short period. But he quit the job for taking up activities aimed at reforming his religion. Thangal travelled all over Keralam to work and preach for his community. In his talks and writings, he strongly opposed religious conversions carried out by the missionaries. (Kareem 1981, 19).

25 Such as Sheikh Muhammed Hamadhani Thangal and Chalilakath Kunhhammed Haji (See Kareem 1981, 11-22).

26 Thangal was the first Muslim who initiated the printing of his speeches in Malayalam. He was well versed in Arabic, Tamil, Malayalam and English (Kareem 1981).

27 Parishkaaram was also a move towards a scientific education, bringing about changes in lifestyles, dressing style, food habits etc.
of stagnancy or backwardness.\(^\text{28}\) It also means acquiring certain capabilities such as more languages in their ‘pure’ form, more social spaces, new jobs etc. which would help in interacting with the changing world meaningfully and on equal terms. In other words, \textit{parishkaaram} is a requirement to position oneself with dignity in the changing norms of social space. Modern education was the basic requirement to fit oneself into this new emerging social space. The notion of \textit{parishkaaram} has connotations and denotations. \textit{Parishkaaram} is used to critique a person when she holds her tradition in contempt or fails to acknowledge her tradition and customs.\(^\text{29}\) And \textit{parishkaaram} is used to describe a person who is knowledgeable, yet has humility and simplicity (kumar 2002, 161-192).

Thangal criticized the mere reading of the Qur’an, saying that “Reading Qur’an purifies intonation, but does not reveal the gist of Qur’an” (Kareem 1981, 438-448).\(^\text{30}\) He advocated understanding and analysing the Quran rather than just memorizing and reiterating the text which would only rectify the pronunciation and reading. A different kind of relationship to the text and an introduction of a reflexive approach are envisaged here. Thangal further called for the ‘Malayala Muslim’ to understand the meaning of Arabic words in Malayalam and Sanskrit by using a dictionary that he had prepared, instead of reading Arabic without knowing the meaning (Kareem 1981, 438-448). He believed that the community did have the opportunity to learn and understand Qur’an in their own language of Malayalam and Tamil (Kareem 1981, 438-439). He promoted studying

\(^{28}\) Backwardness of the community (\textit{samudayathinte pinnokkavastha}) is a recurring theme that appears in almost all the debates of nationalists, spiritual leaders, leaders of the lower castes, Muslim religious leaders (\textit{matha pandithar}) etc. It is studied as an urge to reform many existing customs and to modernize the caste, community and society.

\(^{29}\) \textit{Pacha parishkaari} (ultra modern) is a term used to call people who are too modern to follow their customs and traditions.

\(^{30}\) “\textit{Qur’an, vayana shuddhamakkunnathallathe porulpedathi padikkunnilla.”} (Kareem 1981,438-448).
Malayalam and Tamil, along with Arabic and Arabi-Malayalam, since many of the Moulavis could not comprehend the meaning in Arabic (Kareem 1981, 447). The main concern of Thangal here is that the Malayalam which was used to teach Arabic was in itself a degraded or impure (*suddhiyillatha*) form of Malayalam (Kareem 1981, 438). In such formulations, the aspiration is not for creating a linguistic identity for the community. The attempt is to reform the languages – Arabic, Malayalam and Tamil – into something pure and modern – an attempt to standardize and modernize the ‘impure’ colloquial languages used in reading/learning texts. It is also an effort to introduce a rational understanding of the text instead of the practice of (a ritualistic) reading. This is especially significant as Arabi-Malayalam consists of a mixture of languages such as Urdu, Persian, Malayalam and Tamil (Kunhi 1993, 216). It was a rationalization of the process of learning as interpreting and delineating the ‘real’ meaning from reading. Two processes are inherent in this aspiration for learning pure languages; one is the interlinking of a language with meaning and the other is delineating a general meaning from a standardized and pure language. Thus, a reform of the rituals of reading the Qur’an includes a reform of the languages used in their learning and a reform in their relation with the text, the Qur’an. Earlier, knowing certain texts was valued more as a revered act in itself than for the skills acquired to interpret the texts. The shift initiated a difference between knowing texts and understanding their meaning. The former was a mere act/practice/ritual in itself, whereas the latter was a rationalization of the action. While Thangal asked his community to learn Malayalam and Tamil in order to understand the Qur’an
instead of reading it in Arabic without understanding the meaning, he himself was seen as a person who used an impure (shuddiyillatha) Malayalam.\(^{31}\)

### Discourses on language

While Makthi Thangal insisted on the need for learning a few languages that had some close relations, Chattampi Swamikal wrote a book, *Aadibhasa* (Ancient language), in which he elaborated and attempted to establish the origin of not only Malayalam, but also Sanskrit from Tamil, the Dravidian language (Swamikal n/d).\(^{32}\) His attempt was to reinterpert the given idea of the dominance of Sanskrit and its role as the original language of the region. In Chattampi Swamikal’s interpretation, the role of Sanskrit as the central language was replaced with Tamil.

Chattampi Swamikal’s *Aadibhasa* was also written in the same period in which there was a struggle to free Malayalam from its ‘maternal’ relation to Sanskrit. Swamikal’s attempt was to establish the point of origin of not only Malayalam, but many other languages of the region as Tamil and not Sanskrit (Swamikal n/d). However, in the case of Arabi Malayalm, Thangal did not have to critique Sanskrit as it was not relevant in the context of learning the Qur’an. Thangal asserted the need for not only learning Malayalam, but also knowing it through interpreting the meaning in order to read and understand the Qur’an. Swamikal’s critique of Sanskrit has another dimension apart from the Orientalists’ repositioning of it as the prime language of India. Swamikal was a follower of the

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\(^{31}\) Gangadharan states that Makthi Thangal was the first person from the Muslim community who used prose as a medium of communication, and hence his prose bears the peculiarities of a beginner. It consists of Sanskrit words mixed with Malayalam and Arabic (Kareem 1981, 11-22).

\(^{32}\) See Chattampi Swamikal, *Aadibhasa* digitized by [www.sreyas.in](http://www.sreyas.in). The period in which this book was written is not known. As Swamikal died in 1924, it can be assumed that the period is before this time.
siddha\textsuperscript{33} tradition and was a siddhavaidyan, though this identity was subsumed in his spiritual identity. Most of the texts in siddhavaidyam were in Tamil rather than Sanskrit and this was an old indigenous medical tradition. So the dialogue was equally an attempt at re-positioning Tamil as the prime language for representing wisdom and spirituality.

Languages acquire unique positions and begin to attain meanings from a diverse spectrum of debates. Along with the debates around purity and authenticity of language, the consolidation of the regional boundaries of the state of Keralam in the early twentieth century also lent its character to the Malayalam language. Till that time, many languages had coexisted and interacted with each other and were used in the circulation and dissemination of knowledge in all practices such as vaidyam and jyothisham and, in vidya, the umbrella concept that included many practices. Later, language began to symbolize the originality of a practice, the essence of a region and the identity of an individual. Initially, Malayalam was not considered as a language rich enough to represent religious texts and the texts on vaidyam. Also, the idea of a pure language or a standardized language necessary for learning, as different from the regional, colloquial and mixed variations of it emerged through the spread of modern education.

**Vidya Vs Knowledge**

The indigenous idea of education was also discursively constituted in multiple ways. Sree Narayana guru, the spiritual leader and reformer who spoke and acted against caste ridden practices in Keralam, spread his message of “getting freedom

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\textsuperscript{33} Siddhars are a broad sect that includes devotees of Siva in the Deccan, alchemists in Tamil Nadu, early Buddhist tantrikas from Bengal, the alchemists of medieval India and alchemists and yogis of north India (See White 1996, 2). In the thesis, siddhars are alchemists of Tamil Nadu and Keralam.
through *vidya*” (Panthathala 2001). This ethical move of gaining freedom through knowledge, liberating oneself which also entailed certain responsibilities in relation to oneself with the world is immediately interpreted and tied to the notion of *vidyabhyasam*. The idea of *vidya* was different from the notion of *vidyabhyasam* or education. *Vidya* was suffixed to many embodied practices. *Kalari* was known as *kalarividya*, a play with balls and cups was known as *cheppadividya* or *kankettuvidya*. The former is transformed as *kalarippayattu* and the latter is termed as magic. Learning *mantras* in *vishavaidyam* was termed as acquiring *vishavidya* and knowing medicines to be used in treating poison was known as learning *vishavaidyam*. Guru’s messages were often understood as exhortations to become educated, and become more conscious about cleanliness, abolish caste ridden injustices, abstain from unnecessary rites etc. While the nationalists fought for the “right of entry for all Hindus” in the temples of Keralam, Guru acted against such restrictions for the lower castes by consecrating new temples (thus creating new spaces) with idols of ‘Ezhava Siva’, mirror, metal plate etc. While the nationalists sought to implement the idea of a levelling of all ‘Hindus’ through rights and justice provided by the nation-state, Guru subverted this unachievable idea of rights and justice by creating new sacred spaces. His effort to consecrate a number of temples all over Keralam can be seen as an ethical and, at the same time revolutionary, endeavour to create

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34 *Vidya kondo swanthanraravuka.*
35 For instance, Guru asked the Ezhava community to abstain from rituals such as *talikettu kalyanam* and *pulakuli adiyanthiram*. Both these rituals entailed spending a lot of money. Such messages for reforming the community have to be seen in the larger colonial context in which redefining the life and practices of different communities happened in multiple ways.
36 In 1888, at Aruvippuram, Guru built a temple and consecrated the idol as Ezhava Siva, since the consecration was done by him, an Ezhava, instead of the usual Brahmin priest. In Alappuzha Guru consecrated a temple with a mirror as the idol.
37 Guru consecrated 44 temples with a variety of idols such as Shiva, Ganapati, Subramanian, Devi, Bhagavathi, Sharada, Lamp, Mirror and even a metal plate with the wordings “truth, dharma, kindness, peace” (Panthathala 2001).
alternative spaces of worship for lower castes. However, this has been studied as an effort of hinduisation of the lower castes by replacing the “uncultured” gods of Ezhavas with gods in the pantheon of the upper castes (Reghu 2012, 17-28). Since Guru founded a few Sanskrit schools in his ashrams, his attempt was again interpreted as being steeped in a Sanskritized terrain of Adwaitic spirituality (Reghu 2012). Guru’s notion of vidya and his attempts to create an alternative space for peace and equality in debating with the notion of vidyabhyasam was studied in the larger political context of nationalism. Such perceptions later contributed to the reintroduction of caste hierarchies in many of these temples.  

Vidya is translated as sciences (sastras), or a compendium of rules for the religious or scientific treatise (Jha 2010). Acquiring vidya in many Indian philosophical traditions is not merely learning from/about an external world, it is a learning process that includes the aspiration to ultimately know the self and to be liberated through that knowing. The body was central in achieving this knowledge about the self. In Narayan Guru, vidya (arivu/bodham, knowledge) is a joining together of the knower/subject (I or aham) and the known/object. One who knows oneself has arivu and it entails one with athmabodham or self-knowledge (Oru Samoohika Kazchapadilninnu 2013, 14-21). Knowing oneself is dependent on the precondition of not fixing the ‘I’ with the pride of ‘I know’. In other words, pride is a particular recognition of the ‘I’ or the self as the one who knows. Conceit is a production of a separation between knowledge and the knower (aham) or the self and the other (Oru Samoohika Kazchapadilninnu 2013,

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38 In many of the temples consecrated by Guru rituals are now conducted by Brahmin priests.
So, a separation between knowledge and the knower creates not objectivity, but avidya (arivillayma or blocking of knowledge). In this view, avidya is not ignorance; it is a different notion of the self or a projected self as one who has knowledge and the power of that knowledge. Instead of objectivity or a separation from the knowledge (object) and the knower (subject), arivu (knowledge) requires a joining together of the two. The self-reflexive moment is in the vertex of the joining together. In one of his poems titled arivu (knowledge, jnanam, wisdom, consciousness), Sree Narayana Guru interprets knowledge as follows

*Ariyappedumithu verallarivaayeedum thiranjidum neram*

*Arivithilonnayathu kondarivillaathengumilla veronnum*

*Arivillennaalilee ariyapedunnathundithennalum*

*Arivonnillennaalee arivetharivinnathillarinjeedam* (Guru n/d 198-201)\(^{40}\)

What is known here, when carefully considered,
Is not anything other than knowledge.
As knowledge in this (as the knower and the known) is one,
There is not anything anywhere apart from knowledge.\(^{41}\)

For Guru, knowledge or *vidya* is not separated from the knower and objectivity is not a requirement in accessing any knowledge. In fact, objectivity is an obstruction that separates the knower from the known and produces *avidya* as conceit.\(^{42}\)

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\(^{41}\) Translation from [http://www.sreenarayanaguru.in/interpretations/Arivu-by-SNG](http://www.sreenarayanaguru.in/interpretations/Arivu-by-SNG) accessed on 3.12.14. Nitya Chaithanya Yathi translated the poem. He was the disciple of Sree Narayana Guru and established the Gurukulam in Otacamund. He lived in post-independent India.

\(^{42}\) Gundert’s dictionary translated *avidya* as *rajasagunam*, *mohamathavu*, *haughtiness*, *maya*, *ignorance* etc. (Gundert 1872, 62). I think, here ignorance is the blockage in accessing knowledge, by delinking it as a product owned or accessed by the knower.
In modern education, learning is equated with the process of ‘acquiring’ knowledge and information. The concept of knowledge that gained prominence in the early nineteenth century did not have a consistent meaning. Here, objectivity is the central pillar in the practice of accessing knowledge.

**Notion of freedom**

Today the idea of education and the space that imparts education are contested terrains of competing claims. What does it mean to get educated? This question can be addressed through a different route too, by trying to understand what lack of education means. It is seen as the lack of access to certain institutional spaces, the incapacity to understand the legal and administrative networks of governments, the inability to appreciate artefacts and specific cultural programmes etc. A notion of ‘becoming free’ is ingrained in the idea of becoming a knowledgeable individual through *vidya*. The idea of this notion of freedom was again discursively diverse for the recipients and those who spread the need for education in the nineteenth century.

For the colonial state, education was a medium through which it reformulated better individuals with refined consciousness. These refashioned individuals were envisaged as people with clarity in thought and action and were capable of negotiating rationally with the new world order of industrial and scientific revolution. Here, the notion of freedom through education/knowledge was immediately linked to the nation-state and the citizenship of an individual. Anyone and everyone could not claim citizenship. An individual should have certain capabilities to follow the rules and regulations imposed by the nation-
state. Thus the notion of citizenship, further raises the questions of equality and liberation of an individual.

For the nationalists in India, modern education was a tool of empowerment in bargaining for an equal share with the rulers. For the sudras in Keralam, education was an instrument for getting jobs and entitlements - a freedom that enhanced their status as warriors and helpers of the kings, landlords and gods. The Ezhavas, the ‘untouchables’ who stayed on the top-most step of the lower caste ladder, envisaged education as an enabling mechanism that would change their social status by accommodating them in the newly opened job markets. Their notion of freedom included aspirations in becoming better human beings. At the same time, both the Ezhavas and the sudras felt threatened by the presence of the castes below them who could hinder the freedom and privileges they had so far enjoyed. The implication of this was that in the attempt to become better individuals, there would always be lesser individuals out there to compete with.

When the Guru’s notion of freedom and vidya entails an ethical relation to the self and arivu/knowledge, the interpretation of Guru’s ideas in the twentieth century ends up linking vidya with vidyabhyasam, as the only mode of accessing knowledge. The rationale of the lower castes for getting an education was to transform themselves into another kind of people who transcended the barriers of caste (Chentharassery 1979). A notion of freedom that empowered them to become human beings with dignity and choice was central to their struggle for access to the public space of education. The ideas of freedom and equality were relative in
each case. One could aspire to become better, but not on equal footing with the one who stood above in the caste hierarchy.

While education is seen as a significant mediator in the process of creating a just society in a democratic state (Kumar 2004, 19), it is also a significant prerequisite for equality and progress. The educational space is seen as one that has opened up access to all through various measures of justice, such as free education up to certain levels for everyone, free education for girls, and reservation for certain castes and communities. For communities categorised as the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes and for the backward castes, these constitutional measures are a precondition for entering the educational space. While education is regarded as assuring equality, the educational space is not in fact open to all and social justice measures are prerequisites to make the space open. Such intrinsic complexities unveil and differentiate education from the educational space. This is further complicated by the institutional practices and the pedagogical strategies. Here, justice is informed by prior historical injustice in the form of under-representation of certain castes and communities in the educational and employment spheres. In order to become equal to someone, one needs to acquire certain specific characteristics and also give up certain other intrinsic characteristics. Very often, in a space that is supposed to assure equality for all, one cannot be equal to another while retaining one’s own specific character and culture. Education demands a neutral, secular character from the recipients that transcend their culture, though these qualities are also meant to be produced through education (Kumar 2004). 43 However when the notion of vidya is

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43 The institutional space of the school/college/university and the institutional mechanisms such as the pedagogical tools and the selection of texts etc., are predetermined in principle as neutral,
transformed as *vidyabhyasam* in the twentieth century, the aspirations of the communities differed, the interpretation of *arivu* also varied, and centred on the universal idea of education and empowerment. The notion of the self and its non-separable relation to *arivu* is subsequently reordered with the idea of a willed individual acquiring an objective and disembodied knowledge. This unresolved tension of a transition period and its contradictory shifting meanings are reflected in the perspectives and preachings of all the social reformers mentioned above.

From modern education, the following sections move onto debates on *vishavaidyam*, which show the ambiguities in differentiating between *vishavaidyam* and *ayurveda*. In other words, the debate is a pointer towards the tension that formed at the juncture of the shift from *vidya* to *vidyabhyasam*. The following section analyses the ways in which modern education defines what is valuable in the practices on hand.

**Section II**

**Ambiguous boundaries**

Delineating certain vantage points in the history of the practice of *vishavaidyam* is important in locating the transformations, negotiations and strategies of the practice in its interaction with the state and with similar practices. This history of *vishavaidyam* reveals the dilemmas, the confusions and the ambiguities of the governmental process in monitoring and understanding a traditional practice within its logic and in relation with the logic of the modern educational institutions.

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impartial, secular and hence conducive to all communities even though they are not so in actual fact. Communities or gender adversely affected by biased perceptions or representations do not have any provision to express their discontent.
The princely states, especially the Travancore State supported many *vaidyasalas* and *vishavaidyasalas* with a monthly grant ranging from Rs. 15 to Rs. 30, and these were known as grant-in-aid *vaidyasalas*. Though some *vaidyasalas* of the British Malabar too were aided with grant, the number of such state-supported institutions was less in the northern part of Keralam compared to Cochin and Travancore, the two princely states. *Vishachikitsa* was only one of the eight specialized streams in ayurveda. Apart from the eight specialized streams, there were other unique treatments and medicines in *nattuvaidyam*. They were *Marmavaidyam*, *Netravaidyam* and *Ottamooli vaidyam*. All the three areas shared their basic tenets with ayurveda, yet included a number of unique medicines, oils and methods of treatment of their own (Varier 1980, Unnikrishnan 2011). Though *vishavaidyam* was one amongst the eight specialized streams in ayurveda, it worked as a unique practice in Keralam, with its own medicines and methods of treatment. The widespread grant-in-aid *vaidyasalas* show that the practice was prevalent across the different regions of Keralam.

Despite this fact, in the mid-twentieth century a *Vishavaidya* Board was constituted. It was for monitoring *vishavaidya* practitioners, conducting examination in *vishachikitsa*, to regularize and monitor a widely accepted popular practice that dealt with critical cases of poison, especially snake poison. The examination conducted was mainly to differentiate qualified and unqualified practitioners.

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44 Administration Report of Ayurveda College, 1937-38, 167-184. In 1973, out of the 289 grant-in-aid vaidyasalas that function in the united Keralam, 154 were vishavaidyasalas and 2,49,735 patients were treated there. Also See Administration Report of the Kerala State, 1973-74, 122-138.

45 Kayachikitsa (general medicine), Shalya tantra (surgery), Salakya tantra (ENT treatment), Balachikitsa (paediatrics), Agada tantra (toxicology), Bhuta vidya (psychiatry), Rasayana tantra (geriatrics) and Vajikarana tantra (aphrodisiacs) are the eight specializations in Ayurveda. (Pflug 1992, 24). They are not equivalent to the specialization process in modern medicine. Usually the *vaidya* family will be specialized in one of the streams apart from their knowledge of the general treatment of diseases. So, the students who study under these gurus will get a chance to learn more about one or two of the streams.
traditional practitioners through a *Vishavaidyā Visarada* Certificate (VVC). Until
the introduction of examination for qualification in *vishavaidyam*, one who knew
*vishavaidyā* texts such as *Jyotsnika*, *Narayaneeyam* and AH *Uttarasthanam* apart
from a knowledge of ayurveded were permitted to practice *vishavaidyam*
(Mohanlal 2014, 16). The VVC was actually introduced from the year 1930
onwards, and in 1938, it was restricted to the students of the Ayurveda College,
as a one year specialization. The government did not make any attempt to
regularize or monitor the other seven streams in ayurveded and no other special
boards were constituted. It was significant that the state showed concern in
monitoring only one amongst the four branches of *nattuvaidyam* and one amongst
the eight streams of ayurveded, for a span of 50 years. *Vishavaidyam* was a wide-
spread and a much-needed practice in the region.

In 1929, prior to the establishment of the Board, in the formal ayurveded
educational institution of Travancore, a one-year specialization in *vishavaidyam*
was introduced. The students who specialized in this stream were awarded a
VVC. In 1946, the Travancore state decided to withdraw this specialized course,
but continued the monitoring of traditional *vishavaidyas* through the setting up of
the Board and its certification process. The process introduced new tensions
between the traditional practitioners and the ayurveded students from the modern
educational institutions. The attempt of the state was to bring parity among the
formal and informal specialized practitioners in *vishavaidyam* through the
introduction of an examination and certification. The students of Ayurveda
College opposed this attempt to bring parity between the traditional and modern
*vishavaidyas*. They sabotaged the examination conducted in 1970, at Trivandrum,
by snatching the question papers and tearing them up. The very idea of parity opposes the idea of differentiation that operates between the modern ayurveda practitioners and the traditional nattuvaidyas. The contradiction is that many of the ayurveda students were willing to enrich their knowledge by informally practising under traditional vaidyas. Though the students acquired knowledge informally from the traditional practitioners, they were very particular about separating their status from that of the traditional practitioners. In other words, students who studied at the modern ayurveda colleges saw themselves as superior to those who studied through traditional methods.

In 1972, a vishavaidyam competency examination was again conducted by the Board in Thrissur, to award VVC to the qualified traditional vaidyas. The examination included oral questions and written papers and was for two days. The students of the Ayurveda College initiated a protest against the introduction of a competency certificate for the indigenous practitioners of vishavaidyam, and the government decided to withhold the result of the conducted examination. The protesters were not only concerned about the opportunities they would lose because of this certification process, but also about the uniformity of status and degree between them and the traditional practitioners. The vishavaidyam practitioners who had written the test immediately formed a Traditional Vishavaidyam Association and presented a memorandum to the government asking

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46 Interview with Dr. Raghavan Vettath, a veteran vishavaidyam practitioner at Guruvayur on 18.1.2015. And the interview with Dr. Mohanlal, the first Director of Ayurveda Education, at Trivandrum on 30.06.2015.

47 Many visha and marma vaidyas whom I interviewed were giving training to ayurvedic students who had degrees from the ayurveda educational institutions. Brahmadathan Nampoothiri of Thrissur, Basheer vaidyan of Kozhikode, Manmadhan Vaidyan of Nilambur were teaching some ayurveda graduate students informally in their vaidyasalas or residence.

48 Interview with Dr. Raghavan Vettath, Guruvayur on 18.01.2015.

49 Ibid.
for the publication of the result of the examination conducted. The state did not take any action in spite of repeated pleas from the part of the practitioners. Finally, the Association filed a petition in the High Court, which then ordered the Vishavaidya Board to immediately publish the results. The board published the result in 1974, two years after the examination, in which only ten candidates passed, out of the 800 practitioners who had appeared for the examination. The examination was only for vishachikitsa practitioners who strictly followed the ayurvedic practice and the certificate given was an ‘A’ class certificate. Those who relied on other methods, such as using hens or stones for the treatment of poison, did not even get a chance to write the examination. After 1972, no examination was conducted to qualify the traditional practitioners of vishavaidyam. The Vishavaidya Board set up for this purpose became dysfunctional. By then the separation of traditional and modern vishavaidyam practitioners was solidified through formal institutional education. The number of students who specialized in vishavaidyam was also minimal, as by 1970s antivenom was widely available in modern medical institutions for the treatment of snake poison.

Regularization of a practice is equivalent to legalizing and normativizing a practice. Regularization draws lines of control while setting standards for the normalization of the practice. It decides who should practise, what should be practised, what should not be practised or what should be eliminated in a practice. Regularization also sets the criteria to determine the qualifications of a

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50 Ibid. Dr. Raghavan Vettath, now 80 years old, was one of the organizers of the association which initiated the filing of the petition in the court.
51 Raghavan Vettath was one amongst the candidates who passed and, he has exhibited the framed certificate on the wall of his consultation room.
practitioner. Since it is also a set of norms to perform a practice in particular ways, regularization could not count the experience and efficacy accumulated through its everyday performance and improvisation.

The second case described below, also displays the dilemmas and ambiguities of the state in classifying a practice within the watertight compartment of a specialized stream, *vishavaidyam*, by denying the practitioner a chance to practise *vaidyam* in general. Simultaneously, it demonstrates the confusions of practitioners in negotiating with the governmental process and attempting to fit in strictly within the boundaries of a particular stream of practice. The bewilderment of the practitioners and the officials is in fact a dilemma in differentiating *vidya* from *vidyabhyasam*. When the practitioners uphold the idea of *vidya*, which encompasses a whole lot of codes of practices, the state asserts the notion of *vidyabhyasam* that divides and classifies practices into bounded areas. Till the early twentieth century, the indigenous medical practice did not face such issues of differentiation and classification, even when the *vaidyas* were specialized in one or two streams of ayurveda vis-à-vis *nattuvaidyam*. Rather than being officially recognized as *vishavaidyas*, *balachikitsakas*, *netravaidyas* or *marmavaidyas* through certification, they were popular in a region depending upon their efficacy in their specialization. This popularity did not disqualify them from practising general *vaidyam* or giving treatment for other kinds of ailments. It was the discretion of the people who suffered from disease to choose these *vaidyas* for the treatment of their general ailments. Thus, a different kind of informal certification had happened at the level of popular acceptance and this did
not fix strict boundaries for the practice. Though there was an idea of classification here too, at the level of practice, it was not a strictly bounded one.

Kunjukrishna Pillay was a vaidyan who had specialized in poison treatment and he had a grant-in-aid vishavaidyasala at Mylapara, Pathanamthitta district. From April 6\textsuperscript{th}, 1929 onwards, it was aided by a monthly grant from the government. In 1951, he requested the government to consider his vaidyasala as a combined one for the treatment of both poison cases and general diseases.\textsuperscript{52} In his application the vaidyan stated that he hailed from a renowned vaidya family and had the experience to treat general diseases, even though he was ‘qualified’ in vishavaidyam with an ‘A’ class VVC. For strengthening his request for a combined vaidyasala, he stated that during the inspection of his vaidyasala on 16.6.1931, Inspector Nilacanta Pillay had expressed satisfaction with the vaidya, and had instructed him to send statements including poison and general treatment to the government. This is notable because, as per the rule of the grant given to the vaidyasala, the vaidya had to send only statements of cases of poison treatment to the government. He was meant to treat only cases of poisoning. In another inspection, perhaps the next year (year or date is not mentioned in his application to the government) the Director of Ayurveda, Narayanan Mooses observed that such combined statements are not required to be sent to the government. Only cases of treatment for poison were required as it was a grant-in-aid vishavaidyasala and not a vaidyasala meant for general illness. When

\footnote{Bundle No.627, Health, Labour and Education (Travancore) file No. 10024/1951 dated 8.1.52. Sub: Recognition as a combined vaidyasala for treatment of general as well as vishachikitsa, KSA, Trivandrum.}
Mooses was informed of the existing practice and the qualifications of the *vaidya*, he permitted the continuance of sending combined statements.\textsuperscript{53}

However, Kunjukrishna Pillay’s request was scrutinized by the Director of Indian Medicine and he recommended to the Secretary to the Government, to consider the *vaidyasala* as a combined one, in his letter dated 28.11.51.\textsuperscript{54} Even in the wake of this recommendation, the government issued an order on 17.12.51, allowing the *vaidya* to practice only *vishachikitsa*. The Secretary to the Government decided so by explaining away that the petitioner had qualification only in *vishachikitsa* with a VVC. This certificate was an ‘A’ class certificate.\textsuperscript{55} He surrendered this certificate for a ‘B’ class registration in ayurveda. According to the rule, the petitioner was not eligible to conduct a grant-in-aid *vaidyasala* for general treatment as he did not possess ‘A’ class registration in ayurveda. The report went on to say that considering his qualification in *vishachikitsa* and long service from 1929 onwards, the government could allow him to continue as a grant-in-aid *vaidyan* only in *vishachikitsa*.

A series of ambiguities and uncertainties are revealed in the certification process and the fixing of qualifications for indigenous medical practitioners as strictly general practitioners and *vishavaidyam* (specialized) practitioners. This is clear when the government insisted on the certification process for *vishavaidyam*. The VVC introduced by the government for *vishachikitsa* is an ‘A’ class certificate. According to the Travancore Medical Practitioners Act 1944, registered allopathic practitioners were given ‘A’ class certificate. Practitioners qualified through ayurveda educational institutions were also given ‘A’ class certificate.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid
The traditionally learned ayurvedic practitioners who were registered were getting ‘B’ class certificate (Vinayachandran 2001, 206). However, *vishavaidyam* is monitored through another examination and certification within this general registration process. One could say *vishavaidyam* is doubly monitored. The ‘A’ class certificate awarded to *vishachikitsa* practitioners did not give them an equal standing with neither the registered modern medical practitioners nor to ayurvedic practitioners. That is to say, this ‘A’ class VVC is neither equivalent to an ‘A’ class certificate in allopathic medicine, nor to ‘B’ class certificate in ayurveda. VVC is a certificate given to a specialization within ayurveda. But the Secretary to the government considered the ‘B’ class certificate in ayurveda as inferior to the ‘A’ class certificate in *vishachikitsa* and issued an order accordingly. Though the Inspectors who visited the grant-in-aid *vaidyasala*, and the Director of Ayurveda were aware about the nature and limits of the certification process and suggested favourable orders to Kunjukrishna Pillay, the Secretary who was not an ayurvedic practitioner could not see the limitations of reducing an expert practitioner into only a *vishavaidyam*. Ganesan discusses a similar story from the Madras Presidency, where the graduates of the Madras Ayurvedic College were pitted against the graduates of the government Indian Medical School. The opposition was over the issue of registration as ‘A’ class or ‘B’ class practitioner (Ganesan 2010, 1287-130). Differentiation is the hallmark in situating the status, expertise and qualification of a practitioner rather than the actual expertise of the practitioner.  

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56 The Travancore-Cochin Medical Practitioners Act 1953 was implemented only after 1954.  
57 The Usman Committee Report, 1923 (Part I) found that actual prohibition of unregistered practice as found in many states of the U.S.A. is not suitable for the present condition of India, “….what may now be attempted is only to secure certain rights and privileges to the Registered as
By 1970, the actual control and rationalization of *vishavaidyam* happened at a formal and institutional level. *Vishavaidyam* was taught as a special subject of ayurvedic practice in the ayurveda colleges. Students gave least preference to specialize in *vishavaidyam*. The risk of death is higher in the case of poison. Also, students get fewer chances to deal with poisoned bodies in the institute as the cases which come to the institutionalized ayurvedic spaces are less in number when compared to those attended by individual *vishavaidyam* practitioners.⁵⁸

There are two phases of public debates on *vishavaidyam*; one was the discussion initiated by Adiyodi⁵⁹ in the 1960s in which Kuttikrishna Menon took part as a practitioner to defend and assert that the practice had a different logic. However, when Mathrubhumi books published the serialized essays of Adiyodi, he removed all the controversial sections that appeared in the magazine against *vishavaidyam* (Menon n/d, xxxii). The second phase was a monologue initiated by Manoj Komath in 2011, in which no practitioners or proponents participated from the side of *vishavaidyam*. In between Adiyodi’s and Komath’s critiques, in 1974, Dr A.V. Joseph also wrote a book on snake-bite (*Sarppadamsanam*), but he did not directly address or critique *vishachikitsa*. Instead, he wrote a section on the superstitions about snakes (Joesph 1974, 82-87) in which he pointed out the different beliefs in relation with poisonous snakes. For instance, he says that rural people have a belief that the broken hood of cobra will fly and bite. He says that

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⁵⁸ Interview with Sankaran Nampoothiri, Wadakancherry on 16.01.2012. Sankaran Nampoothiri, a learned ayurvedic practitioner from an ayurveda college, despite the knowledge of *vishavaidyam* he learned from his father, Avanaparambu Nampoothiri, does not practise *vishavaidyam*.

⁵⁹ Adiyodi served as the Minister for Food and Forests from 1971-72, as Minister for Finance from 1972-75 and as Minister for Forests and Irrigation from 1975-77. He procured his Licentiate Indian Medicine (LIM) certificate from Madras and established a hospital in his native place Perambra in 1951.
the hood or the head portion of the cobra did not have any capability to fly, but it could bite and inject poison for a while after separation (Joseph 1974, 83). He also reproduced the tables of categories and pictures of snakes from Adiyodi’s book (Joseph 1974, vii). I will elaborate the main points discussed in the debates between Adiyodi and Komath and will also delineate the main responses of Menon to Adiyodi. These debates expose the change in the nature of responses initiated by people of two different periods, and the mode of accommodating people having different opinions in a debate. While Adiyodi was more accommodating in his critiques of vishavaidyam, Manoj seems to be expressing contempt towards a slowly eroding practice. Adiyodi in fact uses the local names of the snakes shared by the vishavaidyas.

Adiyodi had initiated a discussion about the non-rationality of the practice of vishavaidyam in a widely popular magazine. Menon, a well known vishavaidyam and the one who wrote ‘Kriyakaumudi’, a vishavaidya text, responded to Adiyodi in the following issues of the same magazine. Though Adiyodi criticizes many of the ‘belief’ aspects in vishavaidyam practice, he did not completely refute the efficacy of the practice. In that sense the essays initiated a discussion among the practitioners which was entirely different from the 2011 book of Komath in which he did not leave any space for a discussion. Komath refutes the practice as irrational and superstitious. The author demands an explanation for each and every aspect of the practice from the logic of modern medicine/science. The book is a monologue and none of the existing scattered

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vishavaidya practitioners have initiated a response to the critique till date. It seems many of them were either not aware about the book and its criticism or chose to ignore it. Moreover the organized nature of the practices is almost lost, and the practitioners are scattered all over Keralam, without having any vishavaidya association or an institution such as Vishavaidya Board as in the 1970s. The efficacy of the practice was also questioned by the introduction of anti-venom. While Adiyodi uses the regionally available names to describe the snakes of Keralam/India, Komath uses mainly English names and the standardized Malayalam names. For instance, for Adiyodi, king cobra has a series of names such as karinadan, krishnasarppam, karimjati, malanjati etc. instead of the standardized Malayalam name, rajavembala (Adiyodi 1965, 56). Komath uses only king cobra and rajavembala to describe this snake (Komath 2011). What was Adiyodi doing while incorporating all these regionally or locally available usages? He was acknowledging not only the local usages, but also the local knowledge, even when asserting his scientific explanation. Komath did not show any respect towards indigenous knowledge. He was indeed intolerant towards it and to him the only valid knowledge was modern scientific knowledge. While Adiyodi critiques the mantram (magical spell) in vishavaidyam and keeps silent about the treatment in vishavaidyam, Komath refutes the practice altogether as irrational.

Adiyodi raised a point about the non-objectivity and inaccuracy of the description of snakes in vishavaidyam (Adiyodi 1965, 17-18). Vaidya Bhooshanam Raghavan Thirumulpadu in his introduction to Menon’s book, Kriyakaumudi replied that the description of snakes is an endeavour of biological science.
Learning about the categories of the snakes did not contribute to the ability in treating for poison. For that even knowledge about poison did not contribute much. The changes occurring in a body when affected by poison, the appropriate medicines required at that time and the suitable practice at that time are the subjects of a vishavaidyam. The objective knowledge about snakes and poison may perhaps be an additional knowledge in that situation... The research on those treatments should be done on each of the experience. (Menon n/d, xi-xxv).

Thirumulpad further states that snake bites occurring in different weeks of the month required separate treatment and this was described in Kriyakaumudi (Menon n/d, xvii). Tirumulpad confirms that he saw a book in which the treatment for snake bite was according to the birth stars of the patient. The book is titled as naalpakarcha or vishachikitsamritam. And there is a chapter in AS (Uttarasthanam, Chapter 47, Vishopayogeeyam), which describes the way poison can be used as medicine for treating different diseases (Menon, xvii). Thirumulpad makes it clear through the following statement that the logic of vishavaidyam is different from the logic of modern medicine.

_Vishachikitsa_ never meant merely treatment for snake poison. There is nothing in the world that cannot be turned into poison when not properly used or misused... At times even mother’s milk become poison. And it can be cured by knowing the symptoms. Instead of curing the poison, if one suppresses the symptoms with medicine, immediate relief may be gained, but the poison causes many side effects (_dhooshivisham_) expressed as different ailments...The modern opinion is that these are allergic responses and not side effects of poisons. But (our) experiences prove that allergies could be cured through the treatments of _dhooshivisham_ and insect poison.
In vishavaidyam treatment, the medicines that are used in the treatment of poison destroy the environment that promote the existence and actions of poison in the body, and converts the non-digestive poison into digestive form (Menon n/d, xxii). When the poison is converted into digestive form, it loses the strength to affect the dhatus. All this means, agadam or medicines used in poison treatment will act properly only in living bodies. So, the lack of objective and accurate knowledge about the size and nature of poisonous creatures did not affect the diagnosis and treatment in vishavaidyam (Menon n/d, xxiii).

While Thirumulpad responded as shown above, Menon replied to Adiyodi that vishavaidyam is not sarppasastram (Science about/of snakes) at all. It is a practice that prescribes hundreds of cures for poison. Knowing sarppasastram is good for a practitioner, but it is not essential to treat the cases of poisoning (Menon n/d, 883-884). So, the conditions to learn and practice vaidyam do not emphasize acquiring a set of a priori knowledge about the external cause of poison, nature of snakes or other creatures, their habits and habitats. Everything can be deduced through the symptoms articulated on the living body of a human being.

Section III

Ayurveda education

During the nineteenth century the educational attempts in ayurveda did not have a history of similarity across Keralam. There are similarities as well as differences that constitute the history of ayurvedic education. The first formal educational institution, an ‘Ayurveda Patasala’ was established in Travancore in 1889.
But prior to this, education in ayurveda has been formalized through individual teachers (Gurus), either in their residence or in regionally supported spaces and community supported patasalas (Varier 1980). The Sanskrit Patasala of Tripunithur, Cochin introduced an ayurveda course in 1926. Apart from these state-supported institutions, Kottakkal Aryavaidya Patasala (KAP), started as a private endeavour in Calicut in 1917 (Varier 2002, XI). The Travancore Ayurveda Patasala (TAP) and the Tripunithura Sanskrit Patasala (TSP) gave admission only to upper caste students (Mohanlal 2014), whereas other institutions all over Keralam run by individual teachers adopted a variety of methods. Some of the teachers admitted students up to sudra castes, some admitted strictly upper castes, some others admitted students from all castes and religions. The KAP, the first private ayurvedic educational institution in

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62 This section rely on a book titled ‘Ayurveda Education in Kerala,’ written by Dr. Mohanlal, the first Director of the Ayurveda Medical Education. Dr. Mohanlal hailed from a traditional vaidya family, learned vaidyam from his father Kunjuraman vaidyar, and later joined the Ayurveda College for formal training in vaidyam. He depends upon an earlier text written by Subramania Sharma, ‘Ayurveda in Kerala Universities’. Sharma’s tract deals with the initial seventy year’s history of ayurveda education, whereas Mohanlal analyses the history of 120 years. As of now apart from the official documents, this is the only available authentic source available on the history of ayurveda education in Keralam.

63 TAP opened its doors to the lower castes in 1914, whereas KAP gave admission to the lower castes only in 1933 (Mohanlal 2014, 105). Also see Vivekodayam weekly, 1904, December, 9:5, 1911; August, 7:5&6 There had been continuous appeal from subaltern communities through media and legislative assemblies, to open the gates of these educational institutions for all (See Vivekodayam, 1912, October- November, 2:4). The upper caste vaidyas of British Malabar appreciated the Travancore government for supporting TAP financially and morally. However, the Ezhavas of Travancore vehemently criticized the government for not allowing them entry (only to them and not to all the lower castes) in TAP and Sanskrit colleges of the princely states (See Vivekodayam, 1909, October-November, 6:1 & 2). The Ezhava community had publicly lamented saying that “our people are well versed in Sanskrit and vaidyam, still the Ayurveda Patasala and Sanskrit College did not give admission to our children” (See Vivekodayam, 1912, August, 3:1, Asan). In Madras Presidency, Sri Kanyakaram Parameswari Ayurveda Patasala (KPAP) established in 1898 by the Devaswom Board, did not admit lower castes till 1908. At the same time students from all over India (Hyderabad, Mysore, Travancore, Calcutta, Lahore and Punjab) got admission in this patasala (See Dhanwantari, 1908, December, 6:5, Varier, Madirasyiile Ayurveda Patasala).

64 P.S.Varier, a sudra, learned vaidyam from a Brahmin guru (Krishnankutty 2001, Varier 2002).

65 Advertisement of Kesavan Vaidyan in Vivekodayam 1904, November-December, 4:8&9.1. Venkiteswaran Sastrikal, an upper caste teacher of the Ayurveda Patasala privately taught ayurveda to some lower castes. He gave a memorandum to the state in 1907, seeking permission for his lower caste students to write the ‘Vaidyatest’ examination. The State had approved private
Keralam, admitted students across castes (Varier 2002). It functioned as a stepping stone between the caste-ridden state institutions and the individual-run secular and non-secular endeavours, until the rigid institutional structures of the princely states opened their gates for all due to social pressures. Thus the students from the marginalised vaidya communities were supported by individual vaidyas till the establishment of AVP at Kozhikode.

The individual vaidyas modified their syllabus as per the requirement of the newly evolving institutions by adapting to the changing situations. They also contributed to the development and renovation of an emerging ayurveda by introducing modern requirements of physiology and anatomy under the supervision of allopathic medical practitioners. Some of the vaidyas informed that there will be a vaidyasala (pharmacy) as well as a ‘medicinal garden’ (herbarium) adjacent to their ayurveda patasalas. Earlier the students accompanied the vaidyas in collecting the medicinal plants from the fields, home gardens or hills. So this new concept indicates that there was also an effort at the individual level to organize medicinal gardens in producing herbs. Thus, many individual vaidyas, through their personal endeavours not only contributed to involve marginalized practitioners in the mainstream vaidya practice, but also incorporated some modern requirements into their curriculum.

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66 Kesavan vaidyan’s advertisement regarding his patasala at Kollam, Paravur. This is a recurring advertisement that appeared continuously for five months, Vivekodayam, 1904, September, 4:6,1; Vivekodayam, 1905, July-August, No.5:11&12,1. Editorial note about the opening of a new vaidyasala and patasala by Keralavarma Sastrikal at Karamana, Thiruvitamcore, Dhanwantari, 1906, June, 3:11.

67 Another recurring advertisement that the news paper carried for almost ten issues, Vivekodayam, 1904, October-November, 4: 8 & 9, 1.

68 I could not find anything about the syllabus used by the individual vaidyas
Both the Patasalas of Travancore and Cochin insisted on a good base in Sanskrit for the learning of vaidyam and the admission was restricted to upper caste students. In contrast, the KAP of Malabar gave admission to not only students from all castes and communities, but also allowed them to write the examination either in Sanskrit or Malayalam (Varier 2002). The basic qualification for admission to all the ayurveda patasalas of the State was knowledge of Sanskrit. The students who did not know Sanskrit were selected through an entrance exam and they were taught Sanskrit in the KAP. Thus, KAP initiates a revolutionary step through the introduction of Malayalam, as a language to access and express knowledge in vaidyam. Allowing students to write in Malayalam was an opening to many of the lower castes to enter into the field of formal vaidyam education as many of them relied on vernacular texts and oral knowledge for practicing vaidyam. However, the medium of instruction in the individually run schools varied according to the proficiency of the Gurus. Nattuvaidyan Kesavan from Kollam, Paravur Taluk, advertised the introduction of a new syllabus in his ayurveda patasala. The vaidyan, in the advertisement informed that there was a provision in his patasala to learn vaidyam according to the TAP syllabus or the KAP syllabus. He also engaged a doctor to teach modern physiology and anatomy.

The curriculum, period and mode of teaching were different in every institution, whether they were state-supported institutions such as Travancore and Cochin Patasalas or community and individual supported teaching centres such as

69 Also see Dhanwantari, 1903, August, 1:1, Vaidya Pareeksha Niyamangal.
70 Vivekodayam 1904, November-December,4: 8 & 9, 1; 1908, February-March, 5:11&12, Aryavaidya Patasala inaugural speech.
71 Ibid.
At the level of practice, in Keralam, the vaidyas in all the three regions do not refer to Charaka Samhita (CS) and Susruta Samhita (SS). They follow the regionally available vernacular and Sanskrit texts such as Vaidyasara Samgraham, Sahasrayogam, Chikitsamanjari etc. The only Samhita texts used to learn vaidyam in Keralam was the Ashtanga Samgraham (AS), and most of the teachers and institutions preferred to use Ashtanga Hridayam (AH) an interpretation of AS (Mohanlal 2014, 10; Varier 1980). The Samhita texts became part of the curriculum all over India only after the systematization and institutionalization of ayurveda in the twentieth century. In south India, AH was one of the authoritative and popular text of ayurveda (Valiathan 2009, i). The former director of the Ayurveda Patasala of Travancore, Mohanlal finds the Samhita texts difficult to learn, compared to the AH which is said to be easy to remember. A comprehensive understanding of AH facilitates the learning of the Samhita texts (Monhalal 2014, 10). Memorizing AH was not merely a requirement of vaidyam learning, it was an inherent part of bhasha (language) learning culture in Keralam (Mohanlal 2014, 10). While CS, SS and AS contain a mixture of prose and poetry, AH is composed in verse except a few prose lines at the beginning and the end of each chapter (Valiathan 2009, ii), which makes it easy to memorize. The immense popularity of AH is demonstrated by the more than thirty commentaries on it (Valiathan 2009, iii). In 1979, when the Central Council of Medicine standardized the curriculum of Ayurvedic learning, AH lost its prime position from formal

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72 Interview with Mohanlal, Trivandrum on 30.06.2015.
73 Interview with Krishnan Bhattathiripad, Thrissur on 30.04.2013.
learning spaces. Instead, the other two *Samhitas* were introduced as part of a uniform syllabus. (Mohanlal 2014, 11).

The course period varied in all of the institutions. While the Travancore Ayurveda Patasala had a four year *Vaidyasastri* certificate course and a five year *Vaidyakalanidhi* certificate course, the Cochin Ayurveda Patasala had a six year course for the *Ayurvedabhushanam* certificate. The Kottakkal Ayurveda Patasala insisted on a four and half year *Aryavaidyyan* certificate course. The three other private colleges that opened in the 1950s at Ernakulam, Shoranur and Kannur offered certificates in *Vaidyapadan,* *Vaidyabhushanam* and *Aryavaidyyan* respectively.

The AVP trust members codified a syllabus for a four year degree and a three year diploma course, by introducing physiology and anatomy as part of the curriculum. Their main text for teaching was AH. The other classical texts, *Susruta Samhita* and *Charaka Samhita* were introduced only in the final year, along with the texts prepared by AVP. Furthermore, while discussing about the syllabus the organizers stated, “The medicines used in our treatment are not from the published books such as *Ashtangahridayam.* Keralam had a number of unique treatments such as *uzhichil,* *pizhichil,* *pothichil,* *navara kizhi,* *dhara* etc”.

AVP’s interest in preparing new texts also involved incorporating non-textual knowledge.

At present two degree courses are offered in the government Ayurveda colleges of Trivandrum, Trippunithura and Kannur as well as in all the private colleges.

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74 Please see Chapter 3 for a detailed discussion about the diverse titles and certificates introduced in different patasalas.
75 *Dhanwantari,* 1917, January, 14:6.
76 Ibid.
except the Santhigiri Siddha Medical College (SSMC) at Trivandrum. The four and a half years Ayurvedacharya or BAMS include one year internship. A three year post-graduation is also offered with the Ayurveda Vachaspathi certificate.\textsuperscript{77} In SSMC, the only course offered is BSMS (Bachelor of Siddha Medicine and Surgery) for five and half years including an internship for a year.

**Nattuvaidyasala to ayurveda department**

In 1915, the Ayurveda Patasala was under the supervision of Nattuvaidyasala Superintendent (Mohanlal, 2014). The department was named as Nattuvaidyasala since the distinction between a classical, consolidated ayurveda and the scattered nattuvaidyam was not made at that time as mentioned in previous chapters. Ayurveda and nattuvaidyam were seen as one and the same practice and there was not any differentiation between practitioners who used written texts and those who did not. During the colonial rule, the assertion of the ‘nadu’ or region as an indigenous space against an outside space/invasion/rule was more valid. Nadu and nattuvaidyam represents a rooted space and medical practice respectively. Afterwards, when the indigeneity needed a naming and a title to represent its authentic place among many practices or different indigeneities, the necessity of formulating certain practices as ayurveda or the indigenous knowledge of a region arose. By 1917, the superintendent becomes the Director of Ayurveda and all the grant-in-aid vaidyasalas remained as nattuvaidyasalas or vishavaidyasalas.\textsuperscript{78} This was also a period where ayurveda began to separate


\textsuperscript{78} In the early twentieth century, the vaidyasalas supported by the King of Travancore were either nattuvaidyasalas or vishavaidyasalas. The practitioner in the nattuvaidyasalas treated all kinds of illness, where as that of the vishavaidyasalas mainly treated cases of poison (Menon 1986, Bhaskaranunni 2000).
from among the varied nattuvaidyam and asserted itself as the classical tradition of a region.\textsuperscript{79} By 1950, the name of the department was again changed to the Department of Indigenous Medicine (Mohanlal 2014). The change in designation is also a change in its social as well as intellectual status. The post-independence scenario again necessitated the assertion of an indigenous practice against a modern medical practice. By this time, the projection rather than separation of ayurveda as a classical tradition and elevation of it as \textit{the} indigenous knowledge of a region was almost completed. In 1990, the Department of Indigenous Medicine was named as the Indian System of Medicine and Homoeopathy and by 2010 it was transformed into the Department of AYUSH (ayurveda, yoga, unani, siddha and homoeopathy). In British Malabar, which came under Madras Presidency, until 1945 the \textit{vaidya} institutions came under the School of Indian System of Medicine (ISM).\textsuperscript{80} So, the term ayurveda was never used to describe a coherent and consolidated practice which followed the Charaka, Susruta and Vagbhata \textit{Samhitas}.

Neither the Indian System of Medicine of Madras Presidency nor the \textit{Nattuvaidyasalas} of Travancore and Cochin separated ayurveda and \textit{siddha} practices as distinct practices of Keralam and Tamilnadu respectively. They did not separate \textit{siddha} medicine from ayurveda \textit{vis-à-vis} nattuvaidyam. By the twentieth century, the trend of naming any valuable practice as that of a particular geographical space asserted the ‘indigeneity’ of practices. This invariably invited standardization of not only curriculum, but also the texts used for teaching and the medicines prescribed for illness. Earlier the regional variations influenced the

\textsuperscript{79} See Chapter 3 for the refiguring of ayurveda as a classical tradition.

\textsuperscript{80} See The Usman Committee Report, 1923.
nature of herbs, minerals and metals used in making medicines. The practices, medicines and the ingredients used in preparing medicines varied in the case of south India and other parts as the climate and geography differed. The curriculum differs from region to region, the texts (both oral and written) used for learning also differs in each region though the basic tenets and body concepts remain the same.

**New certificates, new social status**

Till mid-twentieth century, in the three formal institutions of Travancore, Cochin and Kottakkal, the titles awarded to the students who completed the course of *vaidyam* were different. This continued until the reorganization of the Ayurveda Department in the mid-twentieth century, which ended up in standardization of the syllabus and the texts used for learning ayurveda. TAP offered a four year course and the students were awarded a ‘vaidyatest’ certificate after successful completion. Again, not all private students were allowed to appear for the vaidyatest, only upper caste students were allowed (Mohanlal 2014, 9). Those who completed this test successfully were appointed as the grant-in-aid *vaidyas* of Travancore. The course was reorganized in 1910. A four year course offered a ‘vaidya pareeksha certificate’ or Lower Medical Certificate (LMC) and a five year course offered a ‘mukhya vaidya pareeksha certificate’ or Higher Medical Certificate (HMC). AH was the main text for learning apart from AS, *Hridayapriya, Sahasrayogam, Yogamritam*, etc. (Mohanlal 2014, 10).

Pulse reading was a peculiar treatment, perhaps originated/prevalent in Bengal (See *Arogyanikethanam*, Bannerji 1961/2004). At present, none of the ayurveda and *siddha* educational institutions except those run by The Art of Living Foundation include the learning of pulse reading as a method of diagnosis in their curriculum. The foundation gives emphasis to pulse reading in their ayurvedic learning and it has huge demand outside India. (See [http://www.artofliving.org/pulse-diagnosis](http://www.artofliving.org/pulse-diagnosis) accessed on 16.11.2015).
The first reorganization of the course as well as the *Patasala* was initiated in the year 1917 when it was upgraded as His Highness the Maharaja’s College of Ayurveda (Mohanlal 2014, 12-13). Simultaneously the post of *Nattuvaidyasala* Superintendent was changed to the Director of Ayurveda. Instead of the existing LMC and HMC courses, a five year course on *Vaidyakalanidhi* and a three year course on *Vaidyasastri* were introduced. Apart from a knowledge of ayurveda, modern medical knowledge of anatomy, physiology, dissection and medical jurisprudence were also included in the curriculum. But an examination was not conducted on these subjects (Mohanlal 2014). In order to give practical knowledge to the students, an Ayurveda hospital and a pharmacy were established as part of the college. A herbal garden was also established in a 110 hectare land at Pulayanaarkotta. In 1929, a postgraduate course of two years was introduced in the *Ayurveda Acharya* which included writing a dissertation and attending an examination and a viva (Mohanlal 2014). Almost twenty students passed this post graduation within a span of twenty years, till the course was stopped (Mohanlal 2014). During this time in Cochin, the only ayurveda course available was a seven year course in *Ayurvedabhushanam* by the Sanskrit Patasala.

In 1938, the Travancore state introduced an examination to award certificates (VVC) for a one year advanced course on *vishavaidyam*. Though other specialized streams such as *Marmavaidya Visarada* and *Netravaidya Visarada* certificates were introduced in 1944, they were subsequently stopped in 1946 (Mohanlal 2014, 16). In 1950, a Diploma in Agatatantra (toxicology) was introduced in the college.

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82 Also see Bundle No. 172, General Section File No.II-17 of 1918, Vol.I, Reorganization of Ayurveda, KSA, Trivandrum.
83 Ibid.
introduced to the graduate students as a specialized course. The diploma was offered in no other fields such as marma, netra and balachikitsa. This was also stopped subsequently, but VVC had insisted on traditional practitioners and it was monitored through examination conducted by the Vishavaidya Board. Subjects taught in all the four visarada courses were exclusively from the specialized treatments that pertained to Keralam (Mohanlal 2014, 16). When the visarada courses were stopped and specialization in each of the subjects was introduced as an M.D. what was lost in this transformation was not merely a title, but the peculiar indigenous treatments of a region which were developed and sustained in parallel with ayurveda. The courses in all the four areas were taught by indigenous practitioners in the respective areas, and they brought in their unique knowledge and used vernacular texts for teaching them (Mohanlal 2014). When the subjects were integrated into the general curriculum of ayurveda, the specificity of the regionally available knowledge, and the rich vernacular texts that described a variety of medicines and procedures also became extinct. The knowledge of the texts could not be accessed through a general reading of the texts alone.

Transmutation of ayurveda

In 1942, the five years Vaidyakalanidhi course introduced in 1917 was stopped and a new professional course, the Diploma in Indigenous Medicine (DIM) was introduced (Mohanlal 2014). The name of the title to be given had not been decided even after the course had commenced. The duration of the course was six

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82 Interview with Dr. Mohanlal, Trivandrum on 30.6.15.

52
years, which included a one year entrance course, four years of academic course and a one year internship (Mohanlal 2014, 75). The entrance course consisted of learning Physics, Chemistry, Biology and English, which also means that the course was envisaged based on the principles of modern science. The qualification for admission was fixed as a pass in Sanskrit Sastri test or ESLC (Eighth Standard Public Examination). Till then, knowledge in modern science subjects was not necessary for learning vaidyam. The DIM course was continued till 1949 and 150 students from six batches had acquired certificate in this course. Meanwhile, there had been continuous protests and strikes from the side of the ayurveda students, demanding affiliation of the Ayurveda college with the Travancore University, which was formed in 1937. Finally, after ten years of protests, the state decided to form a faculty for Ayurveda in the University in 1949-50 (Mohanlal 2014, 81). Following this, the DIM course was stopped and a four and a half year integrated diploma course (DAM-Integ.) as well as a five year and nine month integrated degree course (BAM-Integ) were commenced. This was envisaged to enrich ayurveda by incorporating allopathic subjects into it. The students of the earlier DIM course were allowed to obtain a Transitory Diploma in Ayurvedic Medicine by taking an examination which included subjects such as anatomy, physiology, pathology, obstetrics and midwifery (Mohanlal 2014, 85). Simultaneously, different departments such as clinical, pharmacological and ayurveda departments were started in the college. By this time, the first medical college of Travancore state had also been instituted. The students of the integrated courses started a strike for ‘practicing what they learnt’ when they preferred to practice allopathy and the same was denied to them. The strike was withdrawn after the ruling Communist ministry decided to allow them
to practice allopathy on a condition (Mohanlal 2014, 102).\textsuperscript{86} The integrated diploma and degree holders had to attend another two years Diploma in Medicine and Surgery (DMS) and those who cleared it were granted registration to practice modern medicine. They were appointed in the Department of Health as Assistant Surgeons. A condensed course in MBBS was also started in the medical college for ayurveda students.\textsuperscript{87} All these processes culminated in transforming ayurveda into allopathy. Actually the intention of the state was to enhance the knowledge of ayurveda students, by incorporating modern scientific knowledge about body, health and medicine. But the students who had studied both ayurvedic and allopathic subjects preferred to practice allopathy. Thus, introduction of the integrated courses ended up in transmuting ayurveda into allopathy. Dr. Mohanlal observes that the integrated courses or the combined courses were not useful for the ayurveda education and the students graduated during the period did not make any contribution to ayurveda (Mohanlal 2014, 103).

In 1959, the state decided to abolish both the integrated courses and introduced a Diploma in Ayurveda (\textit{Shuddha} - pure - Ayurveda course). By this time, the unified Keralam had formed and this \textit{Shuddha} ayurveda course was introduced in all colleges across Keralam.

**Internal Vs external assessment**

While the \textit{vaidyas} are qualified through exams and external assessments conducted by educational institutions, the contemporary \textit{nattuvaidyas} - \textit{paramparya vaidyas} (traditional practitioners) - still believe that the basic qualifications for \textit{vaidyam} learning and practice are \textit{thanmayeebhavam} (an

\textsuperscript{86} Also see the Udupa Committee Report 1958, 22-65.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid.
approximate meaning is a harmonious blending or empathy) and *upasana* (devotion, dedication, worship). One can argue that these attributes are new concepts that are added in the context of the competition among various traditional practices, ayurveda and modern medicine. One can also argue that these were old concepts dug out and attached to the reformulating process for making it appear more authentic and pure. But what is interesting is that during the interviews, these concepts were used only by the *paramparya vaidyas* (traditional practitioners). None of the ayurveda doctors (including the one who acknowledged the contribution of *nattuvaidyam*) interviewed ever used these terms, which indicates that the practitioners have different types of belonging with their practices. Modern education does not need either of these concepts in order to give admission to a student into its institution (no matter whether it is an ayurveda college or medical college). It needs certain qualifications fixed on the basis of marks and subjects or rather an external assessment. It also needs an assessment based on an entrance test. Both of these exams or assessment do not in any way count the inner qualities of a person such as *thanmayeebhavam* and *upasana*. So, one kind of practice highlights the inner qualities which could not be measured but can be assessed only through one’s involvement, devotion and dedication to the practice, whereas the other kind of practice highlights efficiency assessed on quantifiable terms. *Thanmayeebhavam* is important in the context of treatment where a *vaidya* not only feels empathy towards a patient or one who does not feel well, she also sees the other person as equivalent to herself.

*Upasana* is significant for a person’s willingness or desire to pursue *vaidyam*. It is

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believed that a person who does not have *upasana* does not usually stay back and ‘finish’\(^9^9\) the learning of *vaidyam*.\(^9^0\) *Upasana* denotes something more than dedication and devotion. It is a lifelong learning process which needs a will to pursue *vaidyam* through involvement and dedication. *Upasana* leads a person in attaining knowledge progressively and practice *vaidyam* through observation, participation and interaction with the *vaidya* teacher. The basic requirement to sustain *upasana* is perseverance. *Nattuvaidyas* sternly believe that mere learning of texts do not make a *vaidya*.

One who learns *sastras* (the science of medicine) alone cannot offer good treatment.\(^9^1\) It is important to learn *sastras*, but it is much more important to know the *sutras* (the techniques, tricks) of *sastras* for the functional application of *sastras*. There are layered meanings to each word and concepts used in the *slokas* (verses) of any traditional book that deal with medical practice. There is a possibility of misinterpreting the meanings of *yogam*\(^9^2\) when using them in a practical situation of treatment. So, *sutras* are as important as *sastras* in the learning of *paramparya vaidyam*. In other words, one should be acquainted with the intricacies of language that represents *nattuvaidyam*, whether it is Sanskrit, Malayalam, Arabi-Malayalam, or Tamil. A rather simple example would be a word named *kayam*, which means body (*sareeram*), strength, fever, accumulated dirt in specific body parts (*chevikayam* or dirt inside the ear) etc. in different

\(^9^9\) As per many *vaidyas*, there is no finishing point in the learning of *vaidyam*. It is ‘like the sea’ and each one can take whatever they want according to their capacity.(Interview with Ravindran Asan and Selvanesan Asan, at Trivandrum dated 10.05.2011)

\(^9^0\) Kishore Gurukkal, Kollam, interviewed on 24.01.2013, Sukumaran Asan, Melattoor interviewed on 20.07.2013.

\(^9^1\) Selvanesan Asan, a *vaidyan* and *kalari* practitioner, in a workshop on *marmavaidyam* at Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam in June 2011.

\(^9^2\) Here the word *yogam* means the composition of medicines such as herbs, roots etc. and their proper mixing. It has no direct connection with the practice of *yoga*.
contexts. The word is also interpreted as asafoetida in some parts of Keralam. So, the vaidya should have the efficiency and versatility to pick up the appropriate meaning of each usage as per the context of the treatment. This also extends the efficacy of a vaidya in dealing with the language that represent the indigenous medical knowledge which does not necessarily require literacy. Again, even if one is well-versed in sastras and its sutras, these are not sufficient for practicing nattuvaidyam.

Among sastras and sustras there are further differences and certain secrets that can only be acquired through close observation and day-to-day experience. There are hundreds of sastras and sutras which have not been written down. This is elaborated by Sukumaran through an example of chittamruthu, a highly used medicine for the treatment of diabetes. One does not know at what point the creeper chittamruthu produce amruthu, the essential medicine for the cure of diabetes. People – including many practitioners - do not know this and they think that chittamruthu is always good for the treatment of diabetes. The stem of chittamruth must be hung in different places. After two full moons, two sprouts appear in some of those stems. Only in those stems can one find amruthu meant for the treatment of diabetes. So even if the knowledge is available in texts, it could not be accessed just by memorizing that text.

Vaidyas believe that marma (vital spots) and marmasastras (the science that deals with vital spots) are not easily available knowledge as per the requirement of the modern institutions. For them the learning and practice of vaidyam is not an

93 Sukumaran Asan interviewed at Kaladi, Kochi on 8.10.2011.
easily accessible educational package. The nattuvaidyas I interviewed unilaterally asserted that vaidyum cannot be learnt through a four to five year time-bound and fixed syllabus. Learning of vaidyum needs a lifelong dedication and passion and is one where a practitioner encounters and deals with many difficult and peculiar situations. Handling these situations with efficacy, inventiveness and inner strength develops creativity and ability in the practice. Karma sastra is crucial in marma sastra; while working on marma, one has to strongly believe that the action on the marma is going to be effective.\(^9\) Both in kalari and in vishavaidyam, the day-to-day practice (the routine, systematic training of the body) is important in developing one’s potential to encounter and overcome difficult situations of illness or sukhamillayka (being unwell) of the body. There is a dynamic relationship between the knowledge acquired from actual practice, the knowledge accessed through written text or memory and the knowledge transmitted from generation to generation. These different notions of vidya exceed the normative frame of textual and codified ideas of knowledge orvidyabhyasam. They also challenge the fixed curriculum of formal medical education. Creating binaries of theoretical and practical knowledge is insufficient in understanding the larger complexities involved as this chapter has tried to show.

\(^9\) Sukumaran Asan interviewed at Kaladi, Kochi on 8.10.2011.