ABSTRACT

Ayurveda is classified as the indigenous healing practice of Keralam or the Indian System of Medicine, in the official documents. In the realm of practice one can see a variety of practices, most of them claim their stake as ayurveda. What distinct the officially recognized ayurveda and ayurvedic institutions from all these nattuvaidyam (indigenous healing practices)? Why does nattuvaidyam claim that it is ayurveda? What kind of transition has happened when the learning of vaidyam shifts from individual teaching/learning to institutional education? What kinds of tensions are inherent in the transition of vidya (skill, knowledge, expertise, wisdom) to vidyabhyasam (modern education)? These are some of the questions the thesis attempted to deal with. It explores the complementary and constitutive nature of nattuvaidyam vis-à-vis ayurveda, and the ideas of body, health and disease in them. The attempt is to analyse the alternative epistemologies of health and therapy to some extent.

The study looks closely at the transformations in two indigenous knowledge systems of Kerala, namely, kalari and vishavaidyam in their coexistence and interaction with modern education and the idea of knowledge that evolved in the course of time in relation with the practices. How are knowledge systems derived, divided, differentiated and systematised? How do they attain positions of relative privilege? These questions are central to unravel the process that leads to the segregation of practice, knowledge and skill in many indigenous practices.

Through the materials, I demonstrate the making of ayurveda as a classical tradition that occurred through a series of processes. They include interactions,
incorporations and simultaneous marginalization of diverse indigenous healing practices within the larger discursive field of biomedicine, and modern education. The assimilation and marginalization take place not through coercion, but through methods of incorporation, standardisation, categorisation and simultaneous differentiation. The argument is that the naturalization of a practice as an institutionalized, modernized and legalized ayurveda from nattuvaidyam or ayurvedas, is a differentiation and simultaneous elevation of a stream of practice as knowledge, from amongst a series of practices or ways of knowing.

The ideas of body in nattuvaidyam are pointed out with the notions of classification and standardization which are based on the functionality of a body. The significant moments of debates in the education in ayurveda and the corresponding changes occurred in the field of ayurvedic education is discussed to hints at the gradual transformation of the existing notion of vidya to an emerging idea of vidyabhyasam.