

Brief report of the Health Vikalp Sangam, Sittilingi, 12-13th June, 2018

The Health Vikalp Sangam was focussed on Practice of Pluralism in Health Knowledge (details in the attached concept note, along with plan for the two days of interaction). The participants included those who are trained in and work with various systems of health knowledge— Allopathy, Ayurveda, Naturopathy, Homeopathy, and from the tradition of Folk Healing from Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. Besides, there were the social scientists and activists working on sociology and philosophy of health knowledge. It was a small group, of about 25 in all, with some going in and out as they attempted to make time in the midst of their practice of medicine in the hospital of the THI.

The discussions went largely as planned, despite several drop outs due to unavoidable reasons. Each 'vikalp' presented their work as a historical narrative, with development of ideas and challenges that were attempted to be overcome using available opportunities. FRLHT/TDU's work demonstrated the range of activities being undertaken with Ayurveda and Folk medicine as the fulcrum and overarching knowledge frame, but also using modern science to document, research, validate, and explain their forms of practice as well as create alternative practice through an Integrative hospital and state level associations of folk healers. The THI's work demonstrated the possibilities of locally engaged and people-centred health care using modern medicine through a hospital and an outreach programme. This softened the critique of allopathy that many participants and come with, and created the context for a more realistic dialogue where the democratic potential of both modern and traditional knowledge could be discussed.

There was, however, heated discussion when a strong critique was made of the practice of modern medicine, and how the state system reacts to such critiques. It drew various responses: from a plea to be as fair to allopathy as we would like fair consideration of all systems, based on an understanding of the systems own logic rather than impose a logic from outside based on non-understanding. It was also discussed as an expression of a large segment of people on the ground who have negatively experienced the medical system as well how the state responds to any critique or dissent, and therefore the need to see it as an important element in the larger discourse that is offering resistance to the authoritarian state and the undemocratic pluralism it espouses.

An experiment with integration of various knowledge systems at primary level for common health problems that attempted to create an integrated treatment guideline as found most suitable by women of the community offered some useful insights and lessons for all to consider. This brought the discussion around to issues about the nature of 'evidence' ie what kind 'proof' is needed to consider the health knowledge valid and legitimate.

At the end, all participants seemed to have found it a useful exercise, sharing of 'vikalps' across streams not having happened over the past few years. All were enthusiastic about holding another health VS and considered it an annual event desirable, if not once in six months. The newly formed National Federation of Folk Healers was offered as a large collective that was ready to engage with the process. A Natya Vaidya Samagam being organised in Thiruvananthapuram in December was offered as a possible location to piggy back the next HVS. This was considered impractical given everyone's time constraints. Somewhere in central part of the country, sometime next summer, seemed to be the general opinion. A core team was formed to take the process forward.