

Chapter 6

Case Study on Jhankri System in Darjeeling District of West Bengal and Vaidhya System in the Kottayam District of Kerala

6.1 Darjeeling at a Glance

The famous hill station of Darjeeling, spread over a small area of 3149 sq. km (census 2011), is one of the most important district of West Bengal. Nepali speaking population forms majority of the population in this district and is strikingly distinct from the rest of Bengal in terms of culture, language and food habits. It has a heterogeneous population boasting of diverse racial and linguistic groups but, remarkably dominated by the *Gorkha* community. However, there is still some dispute regarding the nomenclature ‘*Gorkhas*’. Some are of the opinion that *Gorkha* is an umbrella term used to include all the hill ethnic groups living in Darjeeling districts viz. *Nepalese*, *Lepcha*, *Bhutias* etc. This group also states that *Nepali* is the only language spoken as vernacular in this region and the same should not be confused with race. A similar figure is obtained in the neighbouring state of Sikkim. Some others contend that there is a district called *Gorkha* in Nepal, from where martial races were chosen for fighting wars in the name of *Gorkha Platoon*. This platoon later on became the world famous *gorkha* force in First and Second World War. Hence, this term *gorkha* became popular all over the world. Keeping aside all these altercations, for present study, ‘*Nepali*’ and ‘*Gorkha*’ are used to refer to the dominant community of the Hills.

6.1.1 Brief History of Darjeeling

Darjeeling, the queen of hills is comfortably ensconced in the lap of the mighty Kanchandzonga. It boasts of a fantastic flora and fauna and a cool and bracing climate. In the early 19th century, this very beauty of the Darjeeling hills and its fresh and crispy enthralled the two British officials, Captain Llyod and Mr. J.W. Grant who on their way to Nepal had spent a week in this mesmerizing place. The idea of the hills as an ideal place for a sanatorium came to their mind. So, they opened negotiations with the Rajah of Sikkim for the cession of Darjeeling, as Darjeeling back in those days was a part of the dominions of the Rajah of Sikkim. In February 1835, a strip of the hill territory about 214 miles long and 5 to 6 miles wide was transferred over to the British by a deed of Grant and came to be known as British Sikkim. British Sikkim then included the villages of Darjeeling and Kurseong. In 1850, the British government sent an outrageous expedition against Sikkim due to the bitter relation between the two which had resulted because of the infirm Rajah’s corrupt Prime Minister. As a result, the Terai and a portion of the Sikkim hills was conquered and seized by the British. Later in 1866, a hilly tract of 486 square miles east of river Tista was annexed from Bhutan in order to keep Darjeeling safe from Bhutanese plundering. This hilly tract was merged in Darjeeling which later on formed Kalimpong sub division. This strip of land was under forest and sparsely

populated when it was first acquired but under the able administration of Dr. A Campbell, the Superintendent of the new hill station, it made rapid developments. The opening up of tea gardens witnessed a surge in the number of plantation workers and settlers who wanted to cultivate the wastelands and clear the forest areas, roads and railways were constructed, communication improved which brought in more employment opportunities and hence a greater rise in population. (Mallay 1907) Most of the immigrants then were carriers, porters or cultivators. The otherwise uninhabited strip of land steadily sprung to life. In the mid 19th century, Sir J.D. Hooker made a botanical exploration of the Indian sub continent and he has mentioned the Lepchas and some Gorkha sub-communities like Magars, Limboos as aborigines of the Darjeeling region. The Darjeeling hills have dealt with both rises and falls of delimitations from the kingdoms of Sikkim, Nepal, Bhutan, the British East India Company, British India and finally the Indian Union in the state of West Bengal.

6.1.2 Healthcare System in Darjeeling

Before the advent of the British in Darjeeling Hills, the total healthcare system was dominated by uncodified healthcare practices known as Ritual Healing System or locally known as Jhankri System. This ritual healing system occupies an important place in the society, particularly in the rural society. Darjeeling Hills is the conglomeration of various ethnic communities viz. Magar, Tamang, Gurung, Rai, Limbu, Lepcha etc and each community has its own healer who performs various ritual ceremonies on behalf of his community at the time of need. These healers include *Bijuwa for Rai Community*, *Fetangma for Limbu*, *Bungthing for Lepcha and Lama for Tamang* etc. Among all these local ritual-healers, *Dhami* and *Jhankri* are the common terms in the hill-tribes and *Vaidha* and *Ojha* in the lower hills. In Darjeeling, among the Gorkha and Nepali community, *Jhankri* is a common term of social status. He may be an ordinary person of any caste having spiritual power who acts as a trance between man and supernatural powers. Still in modern age, people of Darjeeling especially in the rural areas, have the legacy of ritual-healers (Jhankris) among all communities. The people of Darjeeling still prefer to visit the local healer (Jhankri) first for their medical urgency than to a doctor. Basically there are two types of healers (Jhankris) in Darjeeling, one type of healers are trained by their guru i.e. a normal human being having good knowledge of healing system but there are another type of healers who are trained by *ban jhankri*. *Ban Jhankri* is the one who is a deity of specialised *jhankris*. It is indeed a fascinating reality of the region that in the age of global village and universal healthcare system the people of Darjeeling still rely on all these uncodified healthcare system for their basic health facilities. (Thapa 2017) Further, it is also noteworthy to mention here is that starting from birth till the death, in every occasion whether good or bad these healers are needed to perform the concern rituals and pujas. It is evident that the people of Darjeeling irrespective of caste and creed believe in the existence of supernatural entities both in the form of benevolent and malevolent nature. There is a kind of belief system present in the hill society that if they fail to appease the different deities at different times then they have to face various difficulties in life. These deities include both natural deities and ancestral worshipping.

So, to protect the life from the wrath and anger of these deities the people of Darjeeling basically indulge in all these ritual healing system and these healers play a crucial role in negotiating with the deities on behalf of the concerned parties by offering different rites. They are often acting as liaison between the supernatural deities and the human beings. In many occasions we have also seen that the hills politicians are also encouraging and endorsing this ritual healing system. Whether they have any political motive or they simply want to preserve the traditional cultural heritage of ritual healing system that is still a big mystery. Further, it is believed that hill people are basically nature worshippers who believe in nature worshipping. There are many instances where this nature worshipping was being organised in Darjeeling by the then Chairman of Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council late Subash Ghising in the name of “*dhunga ko puja* i.e. stone worshipping”, “*khola ko puja* i.e. river worshipping”, “*jungle ko puja*” etc. *Jhankri* dance (healer dance) was also being organised in different parts of Darjeeling in the name of nature worshipping. Thus, it is revealed that the healthcare system in Darjeeling Hills is associated with culturally rooted belief system and practices such as Ritual Healing System. It is also well evident that the concept of healthcare system in Darjeeling Hills are still associated with the oldest form of religion in human civilization i.e. naturalism and animism.

As per the study made in Darjeeling district of West Bengal, it is revealed that the people of Darjeeling still believe in the practices of informal healthcare system such as *Jhankri* System. It is indeed essential to state that all the different sub-communities within gorkha community have their distinct *Jhankri* such as ‘*Rai community call Jhankri or bijuwa, Lepcha community as Bungthing, Limbu as Fedangma*’ etc. This *Jhankri* culture is very strongly embedded with gorkha community. It is also found that the rural people of Darjeeling are largely dependent upon the *Jhankris* for their basic healthcare needs. But it is also a fact that a considerable number of urban population of Darjeeling district do believe in *Jhankri* practice. *Jhankris* are very essential in Darjeeling, because starting from the birth rituals upto the death rituals everything is done by *Jhankris* in the Hills and it is generally believed that without proper rituals and pujas we human beings cannot lead our life with good health and peace of mind. It is revealed from the survey report that almost all the people irrespective of being a literate or illiterate, urban or poor, rich or poor believe in the *Jhankri* practice. Hence, the *Jhankri* practice in Darjeeling region is often considered as culturally rooted belief system in Darjeeling Hills. *Jhankri* practice in this region is not only the matter of accessibility, affordability or efficacy rather it has become the habit of hill people to follow this *Jhankri* traditions continuously from generation to generation.

6.1.3 Public Health Discontentment

Another important thing which is indeed essential to discuss here is the growing public health discontentment in Darjeeling Hills. It is revealed from the field visit that there is a wide gap in reports submitted by different health organisations and agencies both government and non government and the views of the general masses of the region. It is interesting to note that some of the health activists have mentioned that it is the local

people who do not believe in government healthcare services and always opt for private healthcare services. Whereas the same local people have a saying that the health centres are running without sufficient manpower, medical kits and even medicines. Health centres are there just for name sake. Hence, the people avoid going to health centres in the region. It is also well evident from the field visit that some of the health sub centres in different villages of Darjeeling Hills are running without permanent health staffs together with lack of basic healthcare facilities. While interacting with local residents of Tongsong tea estate it is revealed that the health sub centre and primary health centre are very far from their village. Moreover, the condition of the road is very pathetic and scope for the accessibility of vehicles is very rare. Hence, it is very difficult for the patients to reach the sub centre or the primary health centre particularly in time of emergency. If somehow they manage to reach the sub centre for treatment, it would be useless because sub centre itself is not in the position to provide even the minimum basic healthcare facilities. It is running with a scarcity of medical equipments, medicines and even health staffs. Hence, the people of this region have no other alternative except the private healthcare treatment or informal healthcare treatment such as *Jhankri* treatment. This *Jhankri* System or the practices of different local *Jhankris* in Darjeeling District of West Bengal are totally uncodified informal healthcare practices which are not supported by the government. Hence, these practices are often termed as illegal practices. But it is also well evident that this *Jhankri* culture is an inseparable part of Gorkha society and it has become immensely embedded with their habits of life. In other way, it seems that the government of West Bengal is also not very strict in regard to the public health law implementation, application and adjudication properly in the state. Another important aspect of the fact might be the ethno-cultural differentiation of Darjeeling district from the rest of the Bengal. In pre-independence era, the British often termed the people of Darjeeling as '*Hill Tribes*'. Moreover, it is also apparent that the people of Darjeeling Hills are also not in favour to live in the state of West Bengal and they want their own separate state in the name of Gorkhaland. As a consequence they always try to make themselves and their culture distinct from the rest of Bengal. Hence they are practising these kinds of informal healing system such as *Jhankri* System to make themselves acknowledged as a distinct ethno-cultural race in the state of West Bengal.

It is understood from the present study that majority of the Tribal population in India still believe in '*naturalism*' and '*animism*'. They still believe in the existence of natural deities both in the form of benevolent and malevolent nature. They worship different natural deities in different occasions for the wellbeing of their societies. They have a belief that human society is surrounded by several natural deities and it is the responsibility of human beings to honour and worship such deities for the wellbeing of entire society. Because, it is generally believed that the anger and wrath of such natural deities create human sufferings and diseases. Hence, to avoid sufferings and to maintain healthy and peaceful life people generally worship these natural deities. While making this survey and interacting with the general masses of Darjeeling, it became well evident that the people of Darjeeling do believe in '*naturalism and animism*'. The total population of Darjeeling believed in natural deities and the existence of supernatural powers. The situation of the

rural belt is even more immense. They practise different rituals, pujas and yagyas to appease the different natural deities. Important pujas among them are *Khola ko puja* (river worshipping), *jungle ko puja* (forest worshipping), *Nag ko puja* (snake worshipping), *rukh ko puja* (worshipping the tree), *baari ko puja* (worshipping the field) etc. The man who performs all these *pujas and yagyas* on behalf of the concerned family or society is called 'Jhankri' in local language. So in another way *Jhankri* is a mediator between the super natural powers and the human beings in Hill society.

6.2 Jhankri System

Jhankri, the medical man in the hill society of Darjeeling considers himself as a normal human being. But he is the sole health provider in the rural areas of Darjeeling Hills. It is well evident from the report that almost all the rural people first visit the *Jhankri* for their healthcare needs then only they go to the doctor. The people of Darjeeling Hills believe that *Jhankri* possesses certain supernatural powers to heal the sorrows and miseries of people. It is of the general belief that a *Jhankri* is the man of God on earth, who has the power to communicate with different natural deities and supernatural existence to protect human beings and societies from their wrath and anger as well as from the evil spirit.

It is revealed from the survey that *Jhankri* system is totally associated with the hill society of Darjeeling Hills, particularly in the rural areas. The local people irrespective of any caste or class visit the *Jhankri* for their any healthcare needs. It is found from the sources that the total number of rural population and a considerable number of urban populations are the believers of *Jhankri* practice. In other words, it can be asserted that *Jhankri* system is an integral part of hill society. Every aspect of social life is affected by the *Jhankri* system. It is the *Jhankri* who performs all the rituals and ceremonies relating to birth and death of any human beings. It is of general belief that *Jhankris* have the power to go beyond the material world. Hence, it is believed that while performing death rituals, *Jhankri* often reaches the immortal soul in the ultimate place popularly known as heaven. Every ethnic community within *Gorkha* community performs such rituals to attain emancipation (*mauksha*) for the deceased. Several death rituals vary accordingly with different ethnic caste groups, but one important death ritual is common in all the ethnic caste groups which is locally known as '*Chinta*'. *Chinta* is very popular in all the ethnic caste groups of *Gorkha* community; this *chinta*, generally is a special kind of *puja* or *yagya* performed by *Jhankri* to emancipate the immortal soul. It is further a fascinating fact that while performing '*chinta*' the deceased is often seen alive in the body of *Jhankri* and state the entire things which he or she wanted to share with the family after his or her death. This *chinta* is often performed at night with complete *Jhankri* attire together with different uncommon wearing on the head prepared with the feathers of hen or cock. *Jhankri* often needs one man to assist him in the entire process of *chinta* locally named as '*Dholey*'. *Dholey* is an assistant of *Jhankri* who helps the *Jhankri* in the entire process of *chinta*, starting right from the making of '*puja ko than*' i.e., sort of small temple to the end of the *chinta*. His primary task is to play the (*Dhyangro*) drums and to give the beats while the *Jhankri* dances in front of '*puja ko than*'. In the entire process of the performance of *chinta*, *Jhankris* often come across certain unnatural or magical things.

During the process, they perform certain things and practices which are beyond the periphery of normal human beings. This special kind of puja known as *chinta* is also being performed by *Jhankris* to treat some severe diseases both mental and physical. Further, there are ample of instances where people get well and disease free with the help of *chinta* performed by *Jhankri* to eliminate the diseases. Hence, it is well evident that the healthcare practices of Gorkha community of Darjeeling Hills are distinct and different compared to the mainstream healthcare system of India. It seems very obvious that the healthcare practices of the entire region of Darjeeling Hills are influenced and dominated by the folk culture, customs and values of a distinct ethnic community.

While making conversation with local people of Darjeeling Hill, it is evidenced that people have a great faith in a *Jhankri*. They consider *Jhankri* as the man of God on earth. Because, '*devta laagnu*' or '*devta le ruchawnu*' (*possession by the god*) is a very special kind of thing and it is of the general belief that if someone is possessed by *Devta* (*god*) it means he or she has been chosen as a man of God who has the power to eliminate human sufferings and ensure peace and tranquillity in the society. They have also asserted that there are different kinds of *Jhankris* such as '*kul utreko Jhakri*' (*Jhankri derives his or her powers from their dead ancestor*), '*boju utreko Jhankri*' (*Jhankri derives his or her powers through their female dead ancestor*), '*jungle ko utreko*' (*Jhankri derives his or her powers through the deities of forest*), '*ban jhankri le lageko*' (*Jhankris derive their powers directly through Ban Jhankri, special deity of the jungle (forest)*). It is further believed that among all these *Jhankris*, one who derives the power from *Ban Jhankri* is very powerful and he is locally known as '*Bhuifutuwa Jhankri*'.

6.2.1 Ban Jhankri:

According to local people, *Ban Jhakri* is a natural deity who resides in the jungle. He is endowed with enormous supernatural powers. People asserted that he is the king of the forest who very often dwells in the forest and nearby villages sometimes. It is also evident that no one has seen *Ban Jhankri* till today but they have a very strong belief that *Ban Jhankri* does exist in the society and lives in the forest interiors. They further argued that it is only the *Jhankri*, the disciple of *Ban Jhankri* who can see him. Accordingly, while interacting with the disciples of *Ban Jhankri*, they described that *Ban Jhankri* does not look like any normal human being. His features resemble that of a dwarf with long hair, red eyes, short height, short hands with very long nails and entire body filled with hair and most importantly his feet are turned inwards. They further asserted that he has immense supernatural powers; he is the benevolent deity of the forest and always lives in the forest. The locals strongly believe that the *Ban Jhankri* provides security to all the living creatures of the earth from different negative powers, sufferings and troubles, natural calamities etc. Thus, both the local people and the *Jhankris* asserted that the existence of *Ban Jhankri* is very essential and important in the society. The disciples of *Ban Jhankri* also stated that the wife of *Ban Jhankri* also lives in the jungle. She is also endowed with enormous supernatural powers. But, she is not benevolent like her husband; she kills living creatures and often drinks their fresh blood. Hence, she is often regarded as the malevolent deity of the forest and very menacing for the entire human

societies. These *Jhankris* further claimed that *Ban Jhankri* often hides his disciples from his wife and trains them in very secret places. It is further stated by the local people and the *Jhankris* that the *Ban Jhankri* often kidnaps tender boys and girls and trains them and teaches the different healing knowledge and techniques. The disciples of *Ban Jhankri* further asserted that the training given by *Ban Jhankri* to them was very tough and difficult. The places of training were also very weird and uncommon like steep mountains, dark caves, middle of the river, nearby waterfalls etc. The duration of training provided by *Ban Jhankri* to his disciple is not the same for all his disciples but greatly vary in each case. Such trainings of some of the *Jhankris* have been completed within two weeks whereas some had to stay with *Ban Jhankri* for more than a month and more. During the entire duration of stay with *Ban jhankri*, they were given several uncooked and unnatural foods such as uncooked eggs of different birds, uncooked maize, rice, uncooked reptiles, spiders, etc. They also affirmed that the *Ban Jhankri* informs the parents of the children he kidnaps by appearing in dreams and making sort of conversation about the whereabouts of their children. After completion of the entire training, the *Ban Jhankri* sends them back to their home. Hence, it is of general belief that after coming back home that young disciple, whoever it may be, boy or girl is often considered a powerful person having enormous supernatural powers trained and handed back by the *Ban Jhankri*. Locally he/ she starts getting popular as a *Bhuifutwa Jhankri*. In case of other *Jhankris*, those who are not the disciples of *Ban Jhankri*, he or she needs a guru (teacher) who can train and teach them about the different *Jhankri* knowledge. Hence there is a guru-chela parampara i.e, teacher-disciple tradition in *Jhankri* system. It is the guru who finally decides when the disciple is ready to become a complete *Jhankri* and can start *Jhankri* practice. The important characteristic of this *Jhankri* System is that the total knowledge system of this practice has been transmitted through verbal method. There are no any written documents or records in this system; it is totally and purely informal uncodified healthcare system with lack of institutionalisation and legalisation.

6.2.2 Interview with Jhankris:

Rita Rai, a 52 years old housewife and a local resident of Upper Tong Song Tea estate, is a very renowned *Jhankri* of the area. While making conversation with Mrs Rai, it is evident that she is the disciple of *Ban Jhankri* and talks to *Ban Jhankri* quite frequently regarding any ailment or disease related knowledge. She further asserted that the knowledge and techniques of different life threatening diseases and the ideas of the formulation of several medicines are often taught by her guru (*Ban Jhankri*) in her dreams. She narrated that at the age of 9 years she was kidnapped by *Ban Jhankri* who trained her for around 15 days in different parts of the jungle. She further said that when she came back home after 15 days, she felt like she had woken up from a deep sleep. She also asserted that at the time of kidnapping she had been made unconscious by the *Ban Jhankri* and even at the time of bringing her back home she had been made unconscious. But after that she started getting different knowledge and powers to deal with different human problems, societal problems in her dreams. The entire knowledge and technique of

healing were acquired in her sleep. She mentioned that her deity (*Ban Jhankri*) looks like a dwarf with short height, long hair, reddish eyes etc. It is indeed interesting to state that she does not charge or demand any thing for the treatment of several diseases. She asserted that she has been chosen by God to serve human beings by minimising their miseries and sorrows. So, she accepts whatever they give with a generous heart.

Kiran Rai, a 42 years old male *Jhankri* is a bonafied resident of Tong Song Tea Estate of Dara gown. He is very well known in the entire district for the practice of his profession as a *Jhankri* and popularly known as “*Mangpaa*”. ‘*Mangpaa*’ is a community centric name of *Jhankri*, especially in ‘*kirat*’ community *Jhankri* is often called a ‘*Mangpaa*’. While making conversation with him, he asserted with pride that the Chief Minister of Sikkim and many other cabinet ministers of Sikkim as well as some vibrant politicians and academicians of Darjeeling such as C.R. Rai, R.B. Rai, Subash Ghising etc recognise him personally. He narrated his story that he was very young when he was taken up by *Ban Jhankri*, around the age of 7 years. One fine day while playing with his friends in the ground nearby, he was kidnapped by ‘*Ban Jhankri*’ who kept him for around a month. During his stay with *Ban Jhankri* he got to taste many different weird foods such as uncooked reptile’s meat, uncooked meat of so many animals, rice, maize and fruits etc. He further asserted that *Ban Jhankri* used to train him or pass him the knowledge in very weird places like somewhere near riverfalls, middle of a dense forest, dark caves etc. After, successful completion of his one month training he was dropped by the deity at his home. The *Ban Jhankri* continuously transferred more knowledge to him through the medium of dreams and accordingly he started the practice of healing. Further, it is imperative to state that he is a full fledged healing practitioner. *Jhankri* practice is his main occupation for which he is being paid every month by the ‘*Kirat Khambu Association*’ an ethnic community association.

Pranam Tamang is another *Jhankri* of Dhootriah tea Estate of Darjeeling Hills. He is 37 years and runs a grocery shop. His story is also the same; he narrated that while playing football in the nearby ground at the age of 8 years he was kidnapped by the deity (*Ban Jhankri*). He stated that a very weird-looking man asked him to the side of the ground. He went after which he fell unconscious. He later found himself in the presence of the *Ban Jhankri*. He further narrated that he was dear to the *Ban Jhankri* who loved him very much throughout his stay with him. He was trained by the *Ban Jhankri* for around two months and sent him back home. After coming back home, he was directed by the deity (*Ban Jhankri*) to collect his healing instruments like *dhyangro*, *Jhyamta*, *maala* (drums and necklaces) from different places of the forest at definite time and dates. He further stated that at the initial stage of his *Jhankri* career, every moment of his life was controlled by the *Ban Jhankri*. People and family members did not understand and used to take him to hospital several times. But, it was actually the influence of the deity on him - he asserted this with a little smirk on his face. Then, after some time when he was fully trained with all the knowledge and techniques by the deity he started practising the healing system in public. But, he extended that he never takes this healing technique as his profession, he works hard in his normal life to feed his family by doing different local

work and business. But, when people come to him with their miseries and problems then only he puts his healing knowledge and techniques to use in order to minimize the miseries and sorrows of people. It is also noteworthy to explain that he never demands anything for his service; it is totally free of cost. Though people give him so many things in return of his service, he added.

Lakpa Tamang, a 47 years old man of Pussimbang Tea Estate is also very well known for his *Jhankri* practice in his area and nearby places. While making conversation with Mr Tamang, it was evident that he is not a disciple of *Ban Jhankri* but a disciple of a normal human being and gained his entire *Jhankri* knowledge from his guru (master) who made him a full fledged *Jhankri*. He asserted that to become *Jhankri* one should be admired by the deity (god). It is not the will of an individual rather it is the will of the deity (god) which ultimately fosters a man to become a *Jhankri*. In his case also, he did not want to become a *Jhankri* but unfortunately at a very young age he was possessed by certain supernatural powers which totally influenced his normal human life and forced him to follow the line of *Jhankri* which he described as '*dharma ko line*'. He further asserted that now he is happy with what he is doing and feels lucky enough that he has been chosen by God for this noble cause where he can relieve the miseries and sorrows of human beings. In answering the queries about his origin as a *Jhankri* he stated that for quite sometime it was very confusing and difficult to understand what had exactly happened to him. Because the symptoms were very weird, he often got possessed and started shivering, crying, singing and whistling sometimes, murmuring in a different tone and language etc. Finally one senior *Jhankri* became ready to help him and make him his disciple and trained him thoroughly and gave him the knowledge and techniques of *Jhankri* system. According to him, he is not practising this *Jhankri* practice to earn money or fame rather he is doing this for the sake of wellbeing and happiness in the lives of people. Hence, he never asks anything for his service and treatment of different mental and physical diseases. It is also stated that he is often regarded as the *kul le ruchaako* (*chosen by the ancestral deity*) *Jhankri*.

Another *Jhankri* is known as **Anup Chettri** of Gielle Tea Estate of Darjeeling. He is 36 years old and he started this *Jhankri* practice from a very early age of his life. While narrating his story he stated that he is practising this *Jhankri* system for the last 20 years. It is also evidenced that he is not the disciple of any supernatural deity. He is a normal *Jhankri* trained by a normal human guru. While sharing his experience of *Jhankri* he also asserted that no one can be a *Jhankri* by his own wishes. It is a matter of divine power or divinity; one should be admired and blessed by the supernatural powers and deities to practice this *Jhankri* system. Hence, *Jhankri* practice he considered as beyond science. In his case also it was very confusing, no one understood at first what had happened to him, and he frequently used to get sick, behave weirdly, shiver and murmur in his early stage of *Jhankri* process that too at a very tender age of his life. Finally, after many months he met one senior *Jhankri* who directed him and trained him in the line of *Jhankri* practice.

Shova Maya Limbu, 65 years old *Jhankri* of Tong Song Tea Estate is also locally active with her *Jhankri* practice. She is a normal *Jhankri* and not the disciple of *Ban Jhankri*. She

asserted that she was possessed by *boju* (*ancestral female deity*) at a very tender age which finally led her to become a *Jhankri*. She further asserted that she has to appease the *boju* (*deity*) with several flowers and fruits quite frequently to calm down the wrath and anger of this deity. Thus, she has also made a small temple in her home and worships this deity quite frequently. She also mentioned that she is associated with this *Jhankri* practice for the last 40 years and more. It is evident from the local sources that her treatment of different problems is very effective compared to other *Jhankris*.

6.3 Kottayam District of Kerala

Kottayam is one of the important districts of Kerala. It is situated in the south west part of Kerala. It is often considered as a district with the highest literacy rate in India. Etymologically, the word Kottayam is derived from the combination of two Malayalam words one is *kotta* which means '*fort*' in Malayali language and *akam* meaning '*inside*'. Hence the original meaning of kottayam is '*inside the fort*'. As it is mentioned above that Darjeeling is famous for three '*Ts*' that is *tea, tourism and timber*. Similarly, Kottayam district of Kerala is also famous for three '*Ls*' that is *literacy, lakes and latex*. The district is filled with mesmerising beauty of various rivers, lakes and paddy fields. As per the census of 2011 the total population of the district is 136,812. Kottayam is generally viewed as the main centre for literature hence it is also known as '*Aksahara Nagari*' (*land of Letters*). (<http://en.m.wikipedia.org> n.d.)

6.3.1 Brief History of Kottayam

In early days, probably during the ninth century Kottayam was a part of Vempolinad kingdom under the reign of Kulashchekara Empire. About the end of 1100 A.D. the kingdom of Vempolinad was divided into two separate kingdoms, one known as Thekkumukur and another Vadakkumur. This Thekkumukur family ruled Kottayam for a long period of time. It is generally believed that the royal house was originally situated in Kottayam and it was protected by a fort known as Thaliyilkotta and in Malayalam language kotta means fort. Hence later on the name of the region became popular with the name of Kottayam. It is also evident from the sources that in the latter half of the reign of Thekkumur kingdom the Portuguese and Dutch started trade relations with both the kingdoms of Thekkumukur and Vadakkumur. The main trade was the dealing of black pepper and other spices of the region. It is further evident from the sources that with the growing subjugation of Dutch by Travancore probably in 1742 and with the growing influence of Travancore in the adjoining kingdoms finally led to the annexation of all these adjoining kingdoms under the banner of one rule and to establish a great supreme power known as Travancore in 1753. In this way Kottayam became the princely state of Travancore. During British rule also Kottayam was the part of the princely state of Travancore. It is generally believed that Kottayam is associated with many political agitations of modern days. The '*Malayali Memorial*' agitation originated from Kottayam to facilitate better representation for educated Travancoreans in the Travancore civil service. It is also evidenced that the people of Kottayam had played significant role during the '*Abstention Movement*' of 1930 which vehemently supports the representation

of Hindu lower caste in the Travancore legislature. Similarly, the ‘Vaikom Satyagraha Movement’ in 1924 against untouchability was also a remarkable movement associated with Kottayam. It is also learnt from the sources that during the reign of Travancore, Kottayam became the important revenue division of the state under the direct supervision of Diwan Peshkar. But after independence, more particularly after the integration of the state of Travancore and Cochin in 1949, all revenue divisions of the state including Kottayam became the district of the state and all Diwan Peshkars of the divisions were superseded by district collectors. In this way, Kottayam became a district of the state.

6.3.2 Public Health Condition of Kottayam

On the basis of the facts of the National Family health Survey and other National Health Policy agencies, it is revealed that the healthcare facilities and the health status of Kottayam district of Kerala are very good and above average level compared to districts of various other states in the country. The fourth National Family Health Survey of 2015-16 reported that 95.8% of rural household of the district use improved drinking water source and 98.9% rural household use improved sanitation facility. More than 50% of rural household family members are covered under the health scheme or health insurance. It is already mentioned earlier that Kottayam is a district with highest literacy in the country with 99.8 women literacy and 100% male literacy. Similarly, the report also asserted that 99.4% of rural household used iodized salt. It further shows that 98.2% of expectant mothers received antenatal check up in their 1st trimester, 87% of rural expectant mothers received atleast four antenatal care visits, 99.1% expectant mothers are protected against neonatal tetanus, 98.6% expectant mothers received Mother and Child Protection Card (MCPC), more than 90% of mothers received postnatal care from Doctors, nurses or midwives. It is also evident from the report that very limited number of adults are below normal BMI (Body Mass Index). Accordingly, the problem of anaemia among adults and children are also very nominal. The report further asserted that the problems of hypertension and blood sugar among adults are very limited. Moreover, the survey conducted in the district of Kottayam for present study also shows that the public health condition in the Kottayam district of Kerala is excellent and beyond average range as compared to other districts of the country as a whole. It is further evident from the survey report that the condition of health centres and the facilities provided by the health centres in the district of Kottayam in Kerala is much better compared to the district of Darjeeling in West Bengal. Moreover, the general people of the area are also acquainted with several herbal plants and roots, so they directly rely upon the natural herbs for minor illnesses like cold, cough and fever etc. Mr. Jamon Koneel, a local resident of Parrisipuzha village of Kottayam has said that it is very effective to have a tulsi and ginger mixed juice for the treatment of cold and fever. They generally do not visit health centres for minor illnesses rather they treat by themselves with the help of different herbal medicinal plants, roots and barks. It is also interesting to state that all the local *vaidhyas*, who are indulge in the healthcare practices have their legal and legitimate authorisation provided by the government. So their practices are the approved and legal healthcare system in the eye of law. It is also evident that a considerable number of people in this region do not believe in

the existence of supernatural natural powers possessed by any normal human beings. But they believe in the divine power possessed by bishops and fathers of the Christian churches as well as the priests of the Hindu temples. Hence, it is clear from the above discussion that the public health condition of Kottayam district of Kerala is outstanding and commendable compared to different other districts of the country as a whole.

6.4 Vaidhya System

As mentioned in the previous chapter that healthcare system and the method of diagnosis vary across the world in terms of technological advancement, regional variation and cultural orientation. In the same line, the Kottayam District of Kerala has also witnessed a distinct kind of healthcare practices and healthcare regime which is locally known as *Vaidhya* System. It is evident from the survey report that people have great faith in *Vaidhyas*. People from both rural and urban areas visit *Vaidhyas* for any of their healthcare needs. It is a fascinating that the public health facilities provided by the government to the general masses are excellent but still people go to the *Vaidhyas* for their various ailments. Like *Jhankris*, *Vaidhyas* are also normal human beings with high knowledge of healing different kinds of diseases. But there is no deity or supernatural beings associated with *Vaidhya* System. While making conversation with different *Vaidhyas*, it is evidenced that *Vaidhya* system is not spiritual or supernatural but a pure science based on logic and objectivity. They further asserted that *Vaidhya* system is a part of ayurveda. Like ayurveda, *vaidhya* practice is also legalized by the government in the entire state. Hence *Vaidhyas* in this region are the legalized health practitioners whose methods of treatment are as valid as the treatment of any medical hospital. It is interesting to note that this *vaidhya* practice is not uncodified rather it is a codified healthcare practices in Kerala. Because the methods and the formulation of medicines in this system are written down and documented. Hence, this is considered a traditional codified healthcare system in India which is associated with traditional ayurvedic system of Kerala. It is also evidenced that the entire *Vaidhya* healthcare System is based on the natural herbal plants and minerals. This *Vaidhya* system is a legal healthcare practice based on natural herbal products and minerals. The local people of Kottayam district of Kerala believe that the nature has a solution of every human disease. It is the reservoir of uncountable medical herbal plants including minerals and coppers. But the important thing is that one must have the knowledge of using it. So, this *Vaidhya* system fosters the techniques and knowledge of the use of different herbal plants specifically the formulation of different herbal medicines with the help of leafs, roots and barks of various plants. They further asserted that *Vaidhya* system is very effective in eliminating human sufferings in these regions. Hence, it is very popular not only in Kottayam district but almost in every part of the state of Kerala. Moreover, this *Vaidhya* system is pure science. It is a complete codified healthcare system. The knowledge and techniques of treatment of different diseases are documented and compiled in this system. While interacting with the local people of Parippu village in Kottayam district, it is revealed that the faith healing practices in Kerala are only practised by the different priests of temples and churches. It is indeed interesting to mention here that the health care practices in

Kerala are practised by the people who have genuine degrees from recognised universities and institutions. It is also found that public health care facilities in Kottayam district are very good. The local people of the area are moderately educated and very conscious and concerned about the health care system, both western and Indian system of medicine. It is also important to state that practising without proper medical degrees is often considered as a punishable offence. There are certain communities in Kanuad distict of Kerala, whose culture and rituals are distinct from the other parts of the state. One popular ritual and practice of this community is the *thyaamm* practice. It is generally believed that at the time of *thyyam* rituals or practice, the divine power or God enters into the body of *thayyam* practitioners while performing different rituals and customs.

Vaidhyas are normal human beings with vast knowledge of natural herbal plants. They asserted their practice is a part of '*ayurveda*'. It is evident from the study that there are different layers of *Vaidhyas* practising their healthcare treatment in different parts of the regions. Some have only the capacity to treat basic ailments whereas some can treat different life threatening diseases. Further, it is indeed imperative to state that the practices of all these *Vaidhyas* in Kottayam distrcet are legalized by the government. Moreover, all these health practitioners must have a valid certificate to practice these kinds of healthcare services. This *vaidhya* system is very popular in Kottayam district of Kerala. While interacting with the local people of the area it is evidenced that a considerable number of local people are acquainted with various natural herbal plants, roots and barks for the treatment of several diseases. It is further interesting to state that there is a strict categorization of *Vaidhya* system in Kerala and according to that categorization '*Asthavaidhya*' practitioners are much more powerful and effective in their treatment than other normal *vaidhyas*.

6.4.1 Asthavaidhya System of Kerala

It is generally believed that '*Asthavaidhya System*' is one of the important and renowned healthcare practices in Kerala. People from across the world visit the place for this '*Asthavaidhya treatment*'. Different scholars have given various views and ideas about *Asthavaidhya* System. Some have argued that it is the eight branches of ancient Ayurveda whereas some believe it as the eight-fold path of treating different diseases. Moreover, there is also a belief that *Asthavaidhya* System of Kerala has a very old origin. It is of the belief that in the early days, probably in the very beginning of human civilization, the eight Brahmin families of Kerala had been blessed by God himself to practice the ayurvedic system of treatment to heal human miseries and later on, the healthcare practices of these eight Brahmin families of Kerala came to be popularly known as '*Ashavaidhya System*' of Kerala. People generally believe that these *Asthavaidhya* practitioners are more efficient and effective than other normal *vaidhyas* in the region. It is indeed interesting to state that only the family members of that blessed eight Brahmin families can become the *Asthavaidhya* practitioner in Kerala. The study also revealed that the *Asthavaidhya* practitioners are very limited in number compared to other *vaidhyas* in the region. While interacting with local people, it was learnt that the eight blessed Brahmin families are living in different parts of Kerala. Some of them, it seems have left

this profession and indulge in other business. Hence, it is very difficult to find the *Asthavaidhya* practitioners in recent days. The people of the area also argued that there are very few *Asthavaidhya* practitioners available in different parts of Kerala. They further asserted that it is due to the blessing of the God that these *Asthavaidhya* practitioners are very effective in their treatment. Even the local *vaidhyas* and all other medical professionals have great faith on these *Asthavaidhya* practitioners. In conversation with different *Vaidhyas* and *Asthavaidhya* practitioners, it is evidenced that the *Asthavaidhya* treatment is very inclusive in nature; all diseases both mental and physical can be healed by *Asthavaidhya* treatment. This practice falls under the codified healthcare practice and the practitioners of this healthcare system refer different ancient ayurvedic texts and documents to treat several human diseases. It is further stated that this healthcare system is very systemic in nature and holistic in approach. Thus, this healthcare system is very effective traditional codified healthcare system with legal validity and proper documentation.

6.4.2 Interview with Some Vaidhya practitioners

B. Renjit, 56 yr old man, a local resident of Parripu village stated that he was in this profession since last 15 years. He also asserted that he was basically a farmer and owned very large area of paddy field. But he also treats people of different ailments at the time of need. He further asserted that his healthcare practice is totally legal and entirely based on natural herbal plants. He was trained by his uncle in his early days of practice because his uncle was a very good *Vaidhya* of the locality. So, the knowledge of healing and the methods of treating various diseases are infact learnt from his uncle who he considers as a true guru.

Laxmi , 51 yr old Hindu lady, a local resident of Aymenum village mentioned that she believes in God. She visits the nearby temple of Lord Shiva quite frequently. She asserted with high confidence that she believes in God while giving the medicine and people get cured by that medicine. While asking about the medicine she uses for treating several diseases, she stated that it was only natural herbal plants like tulsi, neem, black pepper etc. She also confirmed that she was not a full time health practitioner but had the legal authorization to practice her healthcare services. She acquired the knowledge of different herbal plants and formulation of the same from her grandfather. She mentioned that her grandfather was a very popular *Vaidhya* of that region and she used to help him in her early days. After the death of her grandfather she used to treat the patients with the knowledge she had been taught by her grandfather. She further asserted that she charges a very nominal amount for her treatment of different ailments.

Another 43 years old man **J. Vergese**, a resident of Parippu reported that he was a full time health practitioner. He is practising this healthcare service since last 10 years after having a complete medical course of the same. He asserted that he acquired his knowledge of this healthcare system with hardship and intense study. Apart from the institutional support he also worked with many traditional old *Vaidhyas* to expand his knowledge. He further stated that he treats all kinds of diseases, even life threatening

diseases. But he asserted quite sincerely that his treatment of severe problems or life threatening diseases is a bit time consuming. A considerable number of patients visit him regularly for their different healthcare needs.

Narayanan Moose, one of the *Asthavaidhya* family health practitioner of the state of Kerala, states that there are eight Brahmin families in Kerala who are the expertise of *ayurveda*, these Brahmin families had been given the special powers of healing God Vishnu himself in earlier days. Hence, the *vaidhyas* of these families are very effective in their healthcare practices and the healthcare tradition developed by these eight families in different parts of Kerala is popularly known as *Asthavaidhya* System of Kerala. Mr. Moose is a renowned *Vaidhya* of the region. People from several parts of the world visit his place for his *Asthavaidhya* treatment. It is indeed important to state that his treatment is popular in all over the world. While having conversation with Mr. Moose, it was evidenced that he is the *Asthavaidhya* family practitioner who have been providing healthcare services to the people since time immemorial. He further stated that his family is blessed by Lord *Bishnu* to profess this healthcare system. He also mentioned that his practice is truly science based because *Asthavaidhya* treatment, which he practises, is completely based on natural herbal plants and minerals of the earth. He further asserted that nature is the reservoir of numerous plants, leafs, roots, minerals etc and it is all these natural herbs which are very essential for the formulation of different medicines either in the allopathic or in naturopathic treatment. He also revealed that his *Asthavaidhya* treatment is systemic and holistic in nature. Hence, it is quite time consuming. But this treatment is very effective and also affordable compared to allopathic treatment. It is a complete codified healthcare system with legal validity.

Another 62 years old *Vaidhya* named **J. Koneel** of Kottayam stated that he is a full time health practitioner and has indulged in this profession since last 30 years. He started this profession at a very young age and is continuing to serve the people till today. He asserted that *Vaidhya* practice is one kind of *Ayurvedic* treatment. It is not fully documented because this healthcare system is basically transformed into hereditary basis. But, some *Vaidhyas* also refer to *ayurvedic* texts, old medicinal documents while treating several diseases. He further asserted that there is no connection of *Vaidhya* system with any supernatural deity or powers. It is free from all superstitions. Regarding his treatment, he asserted that his treatment is very effective and affordable.

6.5 Conclusion

On the basis of the survey conducted in two districts of the two different states of India viz, Kerala and West Bengal, it is revealed that healthcare facilities and healthcare infrastructures are highly developed in the state of Kerala compared to the state of West Bengal. While interacting with the local people of Kottayam district, it is revealed that the people of this region highly believe in Ayurvedic treatment of the area as well as the allopathic services provided by the concerned authority. It is also found that the entire healthcare practices in the Kottayam district of Kerala is totally legalised by the government. It seems that the government of Kerala is more active and responsive

regarding the public health of the state. It is further imperative to state that there is no such informal healthcare system like *Jhankri* System in the state of Kerala. The traditional informal healthcare practices are legalised and formalised by the government like *Vaidhya or Asthavidhya* practice. While, in case of Darjeeling, healthcare condition is very worrisome and alarming. The condition is deteriorating with every passing day. On the other hand, the existence of informal healthcare practice in the name of *Jhankri* system is very popular in the region. People have great faith in this system at the same time it is a more accessible, affordable and efficacious alternative healthcare practice available in the region.