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Seekership, Spirituality and Self-Discovery: Ayurveda Trainees in Britain

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Abstract

This paper examines the backgrounds and motivations of persons trained or training as Ayurvedic practitioners in various institutions offering Ayurveda programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. It draws upon in-depth interviews with practitioners at various stages of their training and practice in order to examine the paths that bring them to Ayurveda, their

training, and the ways in which they apply their knowledge of Ayurveda during and after their training period. This research also corroborate what other scholars have demonstrated in the case of Asian traditions like Yoga and Ayurveda in that they have inevitably undergone shifts in meaning by virtue of their assimilation into the Western, in this case British, context. A significant in Ayurveda's case is the shift away from a preoccupation with remedial medicine (the bedrock of traditional modern South Asia), to a focus on self-knowledge and self-empowerment as a path to 'holistic healing' (understood as spiritual, not just physical, well-being). Even though the Ayurvedic curriculum transmitted at the educational institutions based largely on that taught at Ayurveda colleges in India, the completely different orientations and dispositions (compared to their South Asian counterparts) ensures that the Ayurveda they go on to apply and practise is radically different: 'spiritualised' Ayurveda, in radical contrast to the 'biomedicalised' version obtaining in modern mainstream medicine.

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