



Review Article

# Lifelong Learning in Preserving the Indigenous Health Practices

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## Abstract

India, the world's most populous nation, is characterized by cultural diversity, rich traditions, and indigenous health practices that reflect its heritage. Health, as defined by the World Health Organization, extends beyond the absence of illness to encompass physical, mental, social, and spiritual well-being. Lifelong learning, recognized by UNESCO as a continuous process spanning all ages and forms of education, plays a crucial role in preserving and transmitting such knowledge systems. Indigenous health practices in India, including Ayurveda, naturopathy, herbal remedies, tribal medicine, and community-based rituals, emphasize holistic healing and the interconnectedness of individuals with their communities and environment. These practices not only address physical and mental well-being but also safeguard cultural identity, empower communities, and contribute to sustainable health solutions. The role of lifelong learning in this context is vital, as it facilitates the documentation, transfer, and revival of traditional practices through both formal and informal means. Examples such as the use of tulsi for cough, turmeric for wound healing, and herbal therapies for immunity highlight the value of indigenous remedies. By integrating lifelong learning principles into health education, adult educators and researchers can ensure that this knowledge is preserved, adapted, and made relevant for future generations. Strengthening the link between lifelong learning and indigenous health practices fosters resilience, cultural continuity, and sustainable development in contemporary society.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

India is the most populous country in the world, with a multi-racial, multi-lingual, culturally rich, and traditional country. Several practices of people and their knowledge, lifestyles, and everything replicate unity in diversity, cultural heritage, and health practices at various stages of life. The present paper discloses the concepts of health, lifelong learning, and how

lifelong learning can preserve the indigenous knowledge and health practices.

## Concept of Health

Health is wealth is not only a proverb, but also a fact. Health, according to the World Health Organization, is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. This definition emphasizes

that health encompasses more than just the physical absence of illness; it also includes social and mental factors contributing to overall well-being. In other words, it could be the physical health which is nothing but the functioning of the body's organs, systems and overall physical state including strength, energy and reliance, mental health compasses emotional, psychological and cognitive wellbeing of an individual including with the stress management, positive self-image, the ability to cope with challenges etc., social health refers to an individual's relationships, interactions and connections with others and their ability to participate in social activities and contribute to their community. The concept of health has evolved and reflecting the changing social values, norms, and understanding of the factors influencing the well-being of humankind.

It is very complex to interplay of physical, mental, social, and spiritual dimensions, recognizing the interconnectedness of the health aspects. However, the social determinants of health emphasize how social factors such as poverty, education, access to healthcare, and social support influence health outcomes. No doubt, the majority of studies have shown that the influence of socio-economic and demographic conditions has the utmost influence on the health conditions of the individual. That's why the positive health concept emerged, which focuses on promoting wellbeing, resilience, and positive experiences of an individual rather than addressing diseases or illness.

In essence, health is a dynamic state of well-being that is influenced by a combination of biological, psychological, social, and environmental factors. It's a journey rather than a destination, requiring ongoing efforts to maintain and improve overall well-being.

### Concept of Lifelong Learning

Lifelong learning addresses ...**All age groups** - Lifelong learning is a process that starts at birth and extends across the whole lifespan. It provides people of all ages and origins with learning opportunities and activities, responding to their specific needs in different life and professional stages. (UNESCO). Lifelong learning is the continuous, ongoing process of acquiring knowledge, skills, and competencies throughout life, encompassing all forms of learning, including formal, non-formal, and informal. It's a self-motivated pursuit aimed at personal and professional development. Lifelong learning aims to address the specific needs of individuals at different life stages and in various contexts. It recognizes the need for individuals to continuously adapt to a changing world and evolving job markets.

People can no longer navigate their life course using only the skills and knowledge acquired at school, college, or university. They need to learn throughout life. Lifelong learning is an effective and transformational means of tackling current global challenges.

### Lifelong learning

- improves employability through reskilling and upskilling of workers in a changing world of work;

- enables individuals to master the digital revolution;
- empowers learners of all ages to take climate action;
- supports health and well-being across communities;
- helps countries respond to aging societies, with the global population of people aged 65 or older expected to outnumber youth by 2050;
- promotes tolerance and democratic values in the face of deep social and economic changes.

These factors, among others, make lifelong learning an economic, political, social, and environmental imperative for any country. By making lifelong learning the guiding principle of education systems, governments can make a major contribution to sustainable development at national, regional, and local levels. (UNESCO).

In other words, the lifelong learning concept emphasizes the continuous and voluntary pursuit of knowledge, skills, and competencies for personal and professional development throughout one's entire life, extending beyond formal education. It involves embracing a self-driven mindset for growth, adapting to a changing world, and developing a broader understanding of oneself and society, through both formal training and informal experiences like hobbies, reading, or community involvement. Key Aspects of Lifelong Learning are that it is a continuous lifelong process through various experiences, may be of self or others, voluntary and self-motivated, formal or informal, to promote personal and professional skills. It could promote adaptability of new techniques, which leads to personal growth, employability, and cognitive health. Lifelong learning would promote growth in mindset, set learning goals, utilize various resources, and embrace new experiences.

### Indigenous Health Practices in India

Indigenous health practices encompass a wide range of traditional healing approaches, often holistic and culturally-rooted, that address physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. These practices emphasize the interconnectedness of individuals with their communities, land, and the natural world, viewing health as a collective right and a reflection of overall harmony. The key aspects of indigenous health practices are of a Holistic Approach, which recognizes the interconnectedness of various aspects of well-being, including physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. The community-based practices are of a collective responsibility, with community involvement and support playing a crucial role in healing and well-being. The Traditional Remedies and Practices among communities utilize a variety of traditional remedies and practices, often involving plants, animals, and mineral-based medicines, as well as ceremonies, energetic therapies, and physical techniques. In the Land-Based Healing, many Indigenous cultures emphasize the connection between health and the natural environment, incorporating practices like re-learning languages, attending sweat lodges, and gathering traditional medicines from the land. Cultural Safety often involves cultural safety training for healthcare professionals to ensure culturally competent care. The Two-Eyed Seeing

approach encourages the integration of Indigenous knowledge systems with Western scientific knowledge, fostering a more comprehensive understanding of health and well-being.

#### Examples of Indigenous health practices are

- ❖ Ayurveda: A traditional Indian system of medicine that focuses on maintaining balance in the body through diet, herbs, and lifestyle practices.
- ❖ Tribal health Practices: A traditional tribal medical system with herbs and leaves, practicing traditions and rituals.
- ❖ Naturopathy: A system of healthcare that emphasizes natural remedies and lifestyle adjustments to promote health and well-being.
- ❖ Sweat Lodges: Ritual spaces used for purification and spiritual healing in many Indigenous cultures.
- ❖ Traditional Dances and Ceremonies: These practices can serve as forms of exercise, emotional release, and spiritual connection.
- ❖ Herbal Remedies: Indigenous communities often utilize a wide variety of plants for medicinal purposes.

#### Importance of Indigenous Health Practices

- ❖ Cultural Preservation: Indigenous health practices are integral to maintaining cultural heritage and identity.
- ❖ Empowerment: Indigenous health practices can empower individuals and communities by providing them with the knowledge and resources to take control of their health and well-being.
- ❖ Addressing Health Disparities: Integrating Indigenous health practices can help address health disparities within Indigenous communities, particularly in areas like mental health and chronic disease.
- ❖ Holistic Approach to Health: Indigenous health practices offer a holistic approach to health, recognizing the interconnectedness of various aspects of well-being.

In other words, we need to remember Charaka and Susrutha, who are the pioneers of the Indian Medical field, known for their services extended in physiology and surgeries, becoming the first physician and first surgeon. From 600 BCE to around 1000 CE, India was cherished with rich culture, heritage, and knowledge in all fields, including health and medicine, when the other parts of the world had not even opened their account in the formulation of civilization.

#### Role of Lifelong Learning in Preserving the Indigenous Health Practices.

As said earlier, lifelong learning is nothing but learning or sharing of experiences, information from one person to another, formally, informally, or non-formally. The concept of lifelong learning encroaches on or penetrates into any of the fields, from the basics to the advanced. In such a way, the fundamentals or theories of lifelong learning can also be seen in the health field, or health aspects, or promotion of health concepts in society. Of course, health is nothing but the physical and mental well-being of an individual in society and is very essential in maintaining the harmony in the community, contributing to the national

building and development. Being the adult educator and lifelong educator, and lifelong learning practitioner, it could be said that the indigenous health knowledge and practices need to be preserved. In Ayurveda, and before allopathic medicine came to the country, all ailments were usually treated by the then physicians with herbs from the forests or kitchen essentials.

#### For example

- ✓ For cough and cold – Tulsi (*Ocimum sanctum*), Clove
- ✓ Acidity – Elachi, ginger, keera, cumin seeds, butter milk with cumin powder
- ✓ Stomachache – Azwain seeds or carrom seeds,
- ✓ Anaemia – peanuts with jaggery
- ✓ Toothache – elachi, clove, salt
- ✓ Aromatherapy with essential oils for maintaining mental health
- ✓ Massage with oils – for blood circulation
- ✓ Bath with herbal bath powder to maintain the skin's smoothness etc.,
- ✓ Holy baths for maintaining the communal harmony as well as aesthetics among the individuals
- ✓ Garlic for promoting immunity in the body
- ✓ Turmeric for antiseptic and anti-inflammatory functions
- ✓ Drumstick leaves with turmeric will cure inflammation, wounds, and nail diseases
- ✓ Tamarind seed powder as a water purifier
- ✓ Aloe vera, turmeric, and honey for healing the burns
- ✓ Use of herbs such as ashwagandha for pain relief,
- ✓ Punarnava leaves for healing the cancer tissues
- ✓ Brahmi for reducing mental stress
- ✓ Licorice root to reduce the inflammation
- ✓ Gotu kola (*Centella Asiatica*) for reducing the varicose veins etc.,

Of course, these are only some of the points to recollect and which are fading out from society. As lifelong learning practitioners and educators, we need to focus on these issues, and the knowledge needs to be preserved by conducting a variety of research in the area. Further, culture and some of the traditions will also play a crucial role in keeping good health conditions, both mentally and physically, among the people. The adult educators need to identify, document them for the sake of our next generations, not only to bring the higher cultural heritage to their notice, but also to make them understand the richness of the culture and traditions with rational thinking and preserve it and practice it for sustainable development.

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