

## The Role of Ancient Indian Wisdom in Nurturing the Health and Wellness of Future Generations

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### Abstract

Adolescence is a unique stage of human development and a critical time for laying the foundations of good health. Prioritizing adolescent health not only fosters wellbeing during this critical period but also yields long-term benefits, extending into adulthood and even shaping the health of future generations. COVID-19 has affected all education reception and delivery levels, and considerably affecting their physical and mental wellbeing.

Ancient philosophies and traditions emphasized the cultivation of inner resilience and mindfulness. We reviewed a few traditional Indian practices like Ayurveda, Yoga, festivals, *Samskārās*, and *Gurukula*. Ayurveda and Yoga, being traditional Indian health sciences, showed promising effects on the body and mind, respectively. Both ancient systems advocate personalized lifestyle modifications for optimal health/ *swastha*. *Samskārās* mentioned in ancient texts instill good qualities in a child and remove bad habits.

Yoga is introduced to the children during *Upanayana Samskāra* (thread ceremony) in the eighth year. Practices like *Suryanamaskāra*, *Nādīshodhana prānayama*, and *Gāyatri mantra* were taught. Furthermore, Yoga practice will be continued in the *Gurukula*, which is conducive to the spiritual growth of adolescents (12 to 18 years). *Gurukula* becomes the base of the practice of all the limbs of *Yoga* and Ayurveda, along with their studies, leading to an inner transformation. Practices such as meditation, Yoga, and mindfulness enable individuals to develop self-awareness, emotional wellbeing, and the ability to adapt to stress and change. *Gurukula* introduces the practice of *dinacharya* (daily regimen) and *ritucharya* (Seasonal regimen) in the students' lives to protect their health. Ayurveda offers holistic approaches to health and wellbeing. These systems recognize interconnectedness of body, mind, and spirit and emphasize prevention and balance. The foundation for healthy tissue growth can happen during this time. Teenagers should

utilize this transforming power and balance *Pitta*. Festivals in India are a multifaceted cultural phenomenon encompassing various aspects, including social, economic, religious, and potentially health-related dimensions. These are having individual and communal wellbeing through time-honored customs and practices.

Ancient practices have techniques for dealing with present-day problems. Integrating the wisdom of our ancient Indian practices into the lifestyle of adolescents leads to a resilient, healthy future generation.

**Keywords:** Adolescent health, Yoga, Traditional Indian Practices, Ayurveda.

## Introduction

Adolescence is the transitional phase of life that occurs between childhood and adulthood. This stage of human development is vital for laying the foundations of good health. Adolescents undergo swift development in terms of physical, cognitive, and psychosocial aspects (Martín-Rodríguez et al., 2022). While adolescence is generally viewed as a period of good health, there is a notable occurrence of mortality, sickness, and harm during this stage of life (Balocchini et al., 2013). Much of this is preventable or treatable. Adolescents establish patterns of behavior that can protect their health and the

health of others around them now and in the future (WHO, 2023).

Adolescence is characterized by a sensitive phase where prevalent mental disorders often emerge. The susceptibility of adolescents to the challenges posed by a pandemic is heightened by their limited understanding of its severity and insufficient coping mechanisms (Ashwin et al., 2022). The global pandemic of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) significantly disrupted the lives of adolescents around the world (Ramsey et al., 2023). Studies have shown that disruptions to routines, loss of a sense of control, amplified family stressors, social isolation, changed access to healthcare, and domestic violence establish a setting that fosters exponential growth and development of adolescent psychiatric issues (Octavius et al., 2020). The loss of loved ones has taken a toll on mental and emotional health (Ramsey et al., 2023).

Ancient Indian traditions offer holistic principles of health that often go beyond the scope of modern health. These principles encompass aspects of wellbeing that are sometimes overlooked in contemporary discourse, such as the interconnectedness of body, mind, and spirit, and the importance of living in harmony with nature. Despite the

richness of this ancient wisdom, it is frequently disregarded in favor of modern approaches. However, by embracing practices like Ayurveda, meditation, Yoga, festivals, *Samskārās*, and *Gurukula* education, individuals can tap into a treasure of knowledge that promotes sustainability, holistic wellness, and resilience.

Integrating these ancient Indian practices into daily life fosters a profound connection with the natural world and promotes a balanced lifestyle. Ayurveda, for instance, emphasizes personalized healthcare approaches that consider individual constitutions and environmental factors. Meditation and Yoga offer tools for managing stress, enhancing mindfulness, and cultivating inner peace. Festivals and *Samskārās* provide opportunities for community bonding, spiritual growth, and the celebration of life's milestones. Meanwhile, *Gurukula* education instills values of discipline, self-awareness, and lifelong learning.

Embracing these practices, individuals not only enhance their physical health but also cultivate inner resilience and emotional wellbeing. The ancient philosophies and spiritual traditions supporting these practices offer guidance on how to navigate life's challenges with grace and equanimity. In an era marked by rapid change and uncertainty,

integrating ancient Indian wisdom into contemporary life equips individuals with the tools and perspectives needed to confront future uncertainties more effectively, fostering a sense of empowerment and wellbeing.

To ensure a resilient future generation, we must embrace the wisdom of our ancestors. Ancient Indian civilizations impart crucial teachings on sustainable living, mindfulness, and harmonious coexistence with nature. By integrating these ancient practices into our lives, we can forge a resilient future generation that prioritizes sustainability, wellbeing, and environmental preservation. Let us embrace the timeless wisdom of our forebears and weave it into the fabric of our contemporary society. The present review examines the potential role of ancient practices in nurturing the health and wellness of present adolescents, aiming to contribute to creating healthy future generations.

## 1. Yoga: Exploring the Transformative Power

Yoga, as a holistic system of wellbeing, traces its lineage back thousands of years to the spiritual traditions of India. The philosophy of Yoga includes multifaceted principles encompassing physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of human existence. It is deeply intertwined with ancient texts such as

the Vedas, Upanishads, and the Bhagavad Gita, which provide foundational wisdom on the nature of reality, the self, and the universe.

India's significant contribution to global knowledge includes Yoga, which has gained international recognition and is endorsed by the United Nations (UN). The annual celebration of International Yoga Day is on June 21<sup>st</sup> (UN, 2024). Yoga includes physical postures (*Āsanas*), breathing exercises (*Prāṇayama*), meditation, chanting of mantras, lifestyle adjustments, and adherence to specific spiritual beliefs. By offering training for both the mind and body, Yoga aims to achieve emotional balance (Sengupta, 2012a).

Incorporating yogic techniques into one's routine can improve physical fitness, encompassing cardiorespiratory health, muscular strength, coordination, and flexibility. This integrated approach to wellness fosters a balanced and resilient body, enhancing overall performance and work capacity in various aspects of life (Sengupta, 2012b).

Yoga, as a practice, provides systematic training of the mind and body, contributing to the cultivation of emotional balance. The claim that Yoga facilitates alignment and harmony implies a potential impact on

integrating physiological and psychological processes. In the context of children and adolescents, Yoga is posited as a modality that promotes healthy development and optimal mental health.

In today's fast-paced and often stressful world, the relevance of Yoga in contemporary lifestyles cannot be overstated. Yoga offers a holistic approach to wellness that addresses not only physical health but also mental and emotional wellbeing. In an era where chronic diseases, stress-related disorders, and mental health issues are on the rise, Yoga provides a valuable tool for promoting resilience and enhancing quality of life.

One of the key strengths of Yoga lies in its adaptability to diverse lifestyles and needs. Whether practiced in a traditional studio setting, at home, or even in the workplace, Yoga offers accessible and versatile techniques that can be tailored to individual preferences and circumstances. From dynamic *vinyāsa* flows to gentle restorative practices, there is a style of Yoga suitable for people of all ages, fitness levels, and abilities. American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) advocates the safety and effectiveness of Yoga therapy to assist children and teenagers in navigating and managing various physical and mental conditions (NCCIH, 2020). It also

plays a role in enhancing emotional and behavioral wellbeing. Studies conducted on yogic practices, including *āsana*, *prānayama*, chanting, and meditation, may enhance cognitive abilities, like attention, concentration, and planning. To foster proper development of physiological and mental functions, young people need to learn the art of regulating their dietary habits by opting for *sātvik* (pure and wholesome) food. Adolescents should be aware that the food they consume not only nourishes their physical bodies but also plays a crucial role in shaping their thoughts and behavior.

## 2. Ayurveda: Unveiling the healing essence

Ayurveda, derived from the Sanskrit words *āyu* (life) and *veda* (knowledge), encompasses a holistic approach to health and wellbeing, addressing diverse facets including happiness, sustainable wellness, and longevity. It emphasizes on the preservation of health and the prevention of diseases as its primary objective (Caraka, 1890). In Ayurveda, optimal health, referred to as *svasthya*, signifies being established in one's natural state or inherent equilibrium (Bhishagratna, 2002). Hence the practices like daily regimen (*dinacharya*), seasonal regimen (*ritucharya*), code of conduct (*sadvritta*), and dietetic rules (*āhara vidhi*)

are prescribed for health (Rao et al., 2019). Ayurveda simplifies the understanding of physiological and pathological aspects by grouping the five elements into three categories known as the *tridosha* – *vāta* (comprising space and air), *pitta* (representing fire), and *kapha* (consisting of water and earth).

Diligent adherence to *Dinacharya*, the daily routine recommended in Ayurveda, holds significant importance in establishing balance within an individual's constitution and regulating the biological clock. It also contributes to facilitating digestion, absorption, and assimilation processes, fostering discipline, peace, happiness, and longevity. The *Dinacharya* routine begins with waking up in the morning during *Brahma Muhurta* (before sunrise), followed by *Ushapāna* (water drinking), *Mala-Mutra Visarjana* (evacuation), *Dantadāvana* (brushing), *Kavala* (gargling), and *Gandush* (holding water in the mouth), and others (Lochan, 2008). Following *Dinacharya* can prevent most of the lifestyle disorders. Ayurveda is the science of life that emphasizes the restoration of the health of the individual rather than the treatment of the disease and advocates health at all levels (Caraka, 1890). During adolescence, the *Pitta dosha*, which governs this stage of life

according to Ayurveda, is characterized by qualities of transformation, heat, and metabolism. This period is crucial for formation of body tissues, making it essential to support the body with appropriate nutrition. Adolescents are advised to consume nurturing foods that help pacify *Pitta* and harness its transforming power effectively. Research conducted by the University of Manchester indicates that alongside the central body clock in the brain, the localized body clocks exist in various body parts. These clocks, including those in the joints and spine, can be reset through exercise (Dudek et al., 2023). This finding underscores the importance of *Dinacharya*, the daily routine in Ayurveda, in ensuring synchronization between these local clocks and the central clock. Previous studies have highlighted the repercussions of misaligned peripheral clocks, such as heightened risks of conditions like diabetes and cardiovascular diseases.

*Ritucharya*, a regimen rooted in Ayurveda, encompasses lifestyle and dietary practices aimed at mitigating the physiological and psychological effects of seasonal fluctuations. Environmental shifts accompanying each season significantly influence internal bodily processes. Adhering to *ritucharya* dietary guidelines provides

essential nutrients necessary for combating seasonal ailments. Research suggests that *ritucharya* diet may effectively address a spectrum of lifestyle disorders including, blood sugar, blood pressure, weight gain, obesity, physical inactivity, various kinds of cancer and others (Thakkar et al., 2011). Therefore, healthy lifestyle practices have been implemented in *Gurukula*. Moreover, the *Gurukula* was situated in a natural environment and provided training for those aspiring to master Ayurveda. This nature was the fundamental platform for learning *Āyurvedic* medicines and they were familiarized with their identification, collection, preparation and uses for basic health conditions. *Ritucharya* is practiced as a part of the traditional festivals.

### **3. Festivals: Celebrating cultural heritage**

India's culturally diverse and rich heritage is renowned for its multifarious festivals. A distinctive hallmark of religious life is the observance of festivals across diverse seasons. These festivities typically commence following the harvest season, with enthusiasm and entertainment among the populace. The overarching objective of these festivities is to attain socio-religious harmony amongst the populace and to inculcate a

structured way of life conducive to preserving sound mental and physical health. Historically, the holistic maintenance of physical and mental health has been intertwined with the scrupulous execution of duties within prescribed chronological frameworks in the ancient texts. This concept extends to incorporating vital health regulations into religious rituals, giving rise to new festivals and customs (Yeolekar & Bavdekar, 2007). Festivals in India serve as a multifaceted cultural phenomenon encompassing various aspects, including social, economic, religious, and potentially health-related dimensions. These observances function as a means of cultural transmission, communal bonding, and the preservation of tradition, while also having the potential to influence individual and communal wellbeing through time-honored customs and practices.

'*Ugādi*,' the inaugural festival, is celebrated to mark the commencement of the new year. Every homemakers prepare a consecrated offering known as *Ugādi pacchadi*. This preparation comprises ingredients such as neem flowers, tamarind juice combined with jaggery, fragments of mango and sugarcane, and poppy seeds. This composition exhibits characteristics reminiscent of medicinal formulations. Notably, the preparation is

attributed to the aggravation of the *kapha* during the *Vasantha ritu* (spring season). This endeavor aims to maintain equilibrium among the *tridhoshā* (three humors) (Thakkar et al., 2011). Another pertinent example is '*Dasara*,' a significant festival. It is ostensibly dedicated to the mother Goddess and incorporates the veneration of the Mimosa suma tree, including its leaves, trunk, bark, and root. Medical scholars expound upon the medicinal attributes of these components. '*Dipāvali*' is yet another important festival, celebrated on the twenty-first day following *Dasarā*, which marks the culmination of the *Aswavauja* month. A prominent belief associated with *Dipāvali* is maintaining an incessantly burning fire in the labor room, where medicinal substances are added, along with a mustard oil lamp.

India is characterized by its diversity, encompassing multiple religions and ethnicities. In India, festivities like *Ugādi*, *Dasarā*, *Navrātri*, *Dipāvali*, others are enthusiastically celebrated. These occasions not only bring joy to families but also foster a sense of happiness and unity within communities. As a part of the celebration, we observe fasting, which helps the children build self-control. This concept extends to incorporating vital health regulations into

religious rituals, giving rise to new festivals and customs (Yeolekar & Bavdekar, 2007).

#### 4. **Samskārās: Cultural rites shaping future generations**

*Samskārās* mean "impression" and also "to refine or purify." *Samskārās* rituals that begin before the individual's birth and continue till the end of the lifespan. These are based on ancient texts like Manu Smriti (Maharaj, 2017). It should be done from conception, pregnancy, birth, childhood, adulthood, old age, and death. Ancient texts mention 16 *Samskārās*; 12 are dedicated to children, spanning from conception through pregnancy, birth, childhood, adolescence, and transition into adulthood (Sitholey et al., 2013).

These are described as follows:

1. *Garbhādhān Samskār*: This pre-conception ritual underscores the importance of prospective parents adhering to specific guidelines to enhance the likelihood of conceiving a healthy child.
2. *Punsavan*: Observed when signs of pregnancy become apparent or during the second or third month of pregnancy, Punsavan is designed to promote the overall wellbeing of both the mother and the developing fetus.

3. *Seemantonnayan*: This ritual is performed in the fourth month of pregnancy and aims to ensure the stability and safeguarding of the growing fetus.
4. *Jātkarm*: This ceremony is performed immediately after birth, during which the newborn is allowed to consume small amounts of ghee (clarified butter) and honey.
5. *Nāmkaran*: The formal naming of the child is undertaken on the 10th, 12th, or another auspicious postnatal day.
6. *Nishkraman*: In the fourth month of life or later, the child is taken outdoors to acquaint them with fresh air and the external environment.
7. *Annaprāshan*: This ritual involves feeding the child easily digestible, palatable food made from pulses and cereals.
8. *Mundan* or *Chudākarm*: Shaving the child's head takes place in either the first or third year of life.
9. *Upanayan*: This ceremony symbolizes the child's initiation into the realm of education, as they are presented to a teacher or "Guru" who accepts them for instruction at a *Gurukul* and performs the "yagyopaveet" ritual.

10. *Vedārambh*: During the period spent with the guru, the child receives instruction in the Vedas and other valuable knowledge.

11. *Keshānt*: Cutting the hair, usually performed at the onset of puberty or adolescence.

12. *Samavartan*: This ritual marks the conclusion of formal education and the transition into young adulthood. It involves the individual leaving the *Gurukula* and returning home.

Just as a painter uses an array of colors to create a masterpiece, the character of individuals is formed through the accumulation of various *Samskārās*, or impressions left by life experiences. In ancient wisdom, sages understood the significance of intentionally shaping an individual's character from early childhood through adulthood. *Samskārās* represent a gradual process of training that unfolds over a person's entire lifespan, with each experience leaving a mark on their psyche.

These *Samskārās* were meticulously arranged to create a suitable impression on the individual, much like a sculptor shaping clay to form a desired outcome. They were designed to cultivate positive qualities in children and eliminate undesirable habits, thereby nurturing the development of a well-

rounded and virtuous character. From birth rituals and early childhood education to rites of passage and societal ceremonies, *Samskārās* were woven into the fabric of daily life to guide individuals along the path of righteousness and self-realization.

By consciously engaging with *Samskārās*, individuals not only develop a strong moral compass and sense of duty but also cultivate virtues such as compassion, integrity, and resilience. These positive qualities serve as the building blocks of a harmonious society and contribute to the overall wellbeing of individuals and communities alike. Thus, the ancient practice of *Samskārās* serves as a timeless blueprint for instilling values, fostering personal growth, and shaping the character of future generations.

## 5. Gurukulam: Preserving traditional wisdom

The word *gurukula* is a combination of the Sanskrit words *guru* (teacher) and *kula* (family/home). Every child, irrespective of gender or family background, is entitled to education. Initially, this education begins at home under the guidance of the family, and later, when deemed ready, it continues at the *Gurukula* under the mentorship of a teacher (Sitholey et al., 2013).

*Gurukula*'s education system is rooted in the Vedas. It encompassed diverse subjects such

as language, science, and mathematics, utilizing methodologies like group discussions and self-directed learning. Additionally, emphasis was placed on artistic, athletic, and craft activities to enhance intelligence and critical thinking. Practices like *dinacharya* (daily regimen), *ritucharya* (seasonal regimen) of Ayurveda, *yama* (restraint), *niyama* (observances), *āsanas*, chanting of *mantrās*, meditation, and *pujā* help in promoting mental wellbeing and physical fitness (Rangan et al., 2009). Students were also engaged in daily chores to cultivate practical skills. These comprehensive approaches contributed to personality development, boosting confidence, discipline, intellect, and mindfulness, essential attributes for navigating the challenges of contemporary society.

The children were considered precious in ancient India. The formalization of education became institutionalized, mandating that all children must engage in formal studies. Children were viewed as the future pillars of the nation, it was crucial for children to possess qualities such as good health, intelligence, proper manners, prosocial behavior, extensive education, and skills. Their role in shaping society as adults necessitated an education, training, and

socialization process aligned with the prevailing social structure and functioning.

## Discussion

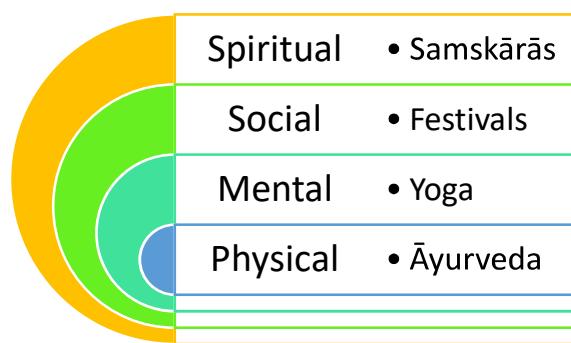
Adolescence is an important stage of human development. The global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly disrupted the lives of adolescents, causing heightened social isolation, a diminished sense of control, and a decline in both mental and physical wellbeing. The conditions may have long-term effects.

*Samskārs* help in gradually and consciously molding/training the individual character and may produce a suitable impression. Hence, they remove bad habits and instill good qualities in children. *Gurukula* education system is based on the Vedas, which include many yogic practices. It has more practical elements than just acquiring knowledge. Yoga helps to calm the mind. *Gurukula* employs various practices, including *āsanas*, chanting of mantras, meditation, puja, and *homa*, to foster a sense of calmness in mind. Generally, when the mind is calm and explicit memory improves (Rangan et al., 2009).

Yoga is a safe and potentially effective therapy that may help adolescents to cope with physical, mental, emotional, and behavioral wellbeing. Ayurveda aims to prevent illnesses by recommending a specific

regimen of the day (*dinacharyas*) and a schedule according to seasons (*ritucharya*). The recommendations put forth by Ayurveda experts for maintaining good health have seamlessly become part of shared customs and rituals observed during various seasonal religious festivals. These practices aim to nurture the health of individuals, including children, and mitigate the influences of seasonal changes on their physical and mental wellbeing.

#### **Fig 01: Role of the ancient wisdom of India on three levels of health**



#### **CONCLUSION**

We conclude that ancient practices like Ayurveda, Yoga, Festivals, *Samskāra*, and *Gurukula* guided an individual's life from childhood. The ancient practices were founded on a positive perspective toward children's growth, education, eventual independence, roles as adults, and their contributions to society.

This systematic training of body, mind, and spirit was lost in the shadow of modern science and education. There is an urgent need to understand and revive ancient Indian practices to fulfill adolescents' present and future needs. Furthermore, it helps in nurturing the health and wellness of future generations.

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