

Ritual Heat and Purification: A Comparative Study of Lakota Inípi and Ayurveda Svedana

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In many different cultures, intense heat has long been used to transform the human experiences of illness as well as healing. The study offers a comparative analysis of two different cultural practices linked with heat: the Lakota Inípi (sweat lodge ceremony) and the Ayurvedic Svedana Karma (therapeutic sudation). Though both Ayurveda Svedana as well as the Lakota Inipi involve deliberate exposure to heat and the induction of sweating, their emergence is fundamentally different in terms of meaning, context, culture and intellectual traditions in two distinct parts of the world. The Inípi is a sacred communal ceremony embedded within Lakota (Native American Tribe aka Teton Sioux) spiritual life, while Svedana Karma is a therapeutic procedure mentioned in the Ayurveda Text of Charaka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita which helps understanding health, disease, and bodily balance. In this qualitative comparative literature review, the study outlines each tradition in its own terms before drawing them into a thematic comparison. The discussion compares themes together, such as physical and therapeutic functions, purification, spiritual and symbolic meanings, and psychological dimensions across Lakota Inipi and Svedana, how they are closely connected. This reveals very important parallels, including the shared use of heat to induce sweating, relieve bodily discomfort, and facilitate processes of transformation as well as healing. However at the same time, the meanings and context of the two practices remain very different: the Inípi focuses more on collective ceremonial experience, prayer, spiritual renewal, and relationships with the sacred, whereas Svedana Karma follows a more individualised and therapeutically structured approach to managing bodily conditions known as Tri-dosha. By introducing these traditions in a discursive framework that recognizes cultural

particularities of both without overshadowing one with the other, the researchers show how the role of heat in rituals can help bridge the gap between bodies and minds, as well as the ethical importance of recognizing such cultural specificities when heat practices become popular outside their traditional context.

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1. Introduction

"Ritual heat" and thermal therapies are universal phenomena, appearing in many diverse cultures across the globe. Sweating practices such as the Finnish sauna, Russian *bania*, Islamic *hammam*, Japanese *mushi-buro*, African sweat huts, and the ancient Greco-Roman baths have all been used over the period of time to promote human well-being [Bartholomew, 2018]. This widespread independent development of thermal practices across cultures in distinct locations may suggest the shared way humans respond to heat. However, this similarity may be due to the reason that there may be similar environmental conditions or universal availability of water and heat for the purpose of healing. Historical literature shows that humans have built sweat baths for millennia. For example, archaeologists have found some structures of sweat bathing dating back 2,500 years in Mesoamerica, as well as the written records from the 11th century describe early Slavic people using wooden sweat houses where water was poured over the hot stones [Wójtowicz-Wcisło, 2023]. According to historical accounts, these thermal therapies provided direct medical relief and were used frequently on humans. In the 18th century, people in Africa treated fevers by placing the sick person over hot wood embers covered with wet branches, creating a steam bath that caused heavy sweating for healing [Bartholomew, 2018]. Similarly, the rural communities in Ireland built heated sod mounds to treat illnesses and improve skin conditions [Bartholomew, 2018].

Beyond the notion of simple hygiene and disease treatment, the literature analyse these thermal therapies as serving four main, interconnected purposes for human groups which are social and hygienic practices, therapeutic healing, care for mothers giving birth, and religious worship [Wójtowicz-Wcisło, 2023]. The religious and spiritual dimension is vital. As anthropologist A.F.C. Wallace noted, a vital component of religious behavior globally is the use of 'physiological exercise' to manipulate the body to induce states of spiritual ecstasy in humans. In many traditions, this involves putting the body under extreme stress through fasting, pain, or physical exhaustion.

Ancient peoples did not differentiated the physical body from the spirit. Instead they used extreme heat to force impurities out of the body, they simultaneously believed they were purging the negative emotions and spiritual illnesses [Bartholomew, 2018]. Researchers interpret the traditional bathhouse were considered as a sacred, "liminal (transitional)" space—an in-between gateway where people could step outside of everyday time or daily routine to connect with the powerful, natural forces of responsible for creation and destruction [Wójtowicz-Wcisło, 2023]. Bradley Y. Bartholomew's research argues that sweating produced in a great quantity inherently produces physical, mental, and spiritual benefits for human beings. This is regardless of the specific cultural practice that causes it, therefore it is universal [Bartholomew, 2018].

Beyond simple physical health, Bartholomew explores that there are deep psychological impacts of extreme heat therapies. Enduring an intensely heated environment triggers a unique "psychobiological state". Staying in intense heat creates a special mind-body state that helps reduce physical pain and emotional distress [Bartholomew, 2018]. He also highlights that this altered state creates fundamental changes in how individuals perceive, evaluate, and think about themselves with respect to the rest of the world [Bartholomew, 2018]. Such rituals often involve a guide who uses language to motivate and to help participants push their bodies to the extreme and reach a deeper, sublime state of meditation [Bartholomew, 2018]

It can be said that ancient cultures may not have understood modern biology, but they clearly recognised and utilised the outcome. By elevating thermal therapies to the status of sacred rituals, human societies universally discovered a powerful, shared tool to heal the body, cleanse the mind, and restore the human spirit.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

The Womb of the Earth: Cosmology, Animism, and Rebirth in the Lakota Inípi Rite

The meaning of the practice starts with its name. In the Lakota language, the word *ni* means "to be alive," and *Inipi* translates to "they are receiving life". It can be described in another way that it means "they revitalize themselves" [Lame Deer and Sarkis, The Lakota Sweat Lodge Cards]. Inipi is a purification ritual that has its ancient roots that has existed in the Lakota culture near the Black Hills Region of North and Central Region of the United States of America for thousands of years [Lame Deer and Sarkis, The Lakota Sweat Lodge Cards]. It is not a modern invention, but an inherent part of their history. Tradition teaches that the Inipi was brought to the people by a spiritual figure named *Kanka*, she is also known as the Old Woman Sorceress [Lame Deer and Sarkis, The Lakota Sweat Lodge Cards]. She brought this rite so the people could purify themselves physically, mentally, and spiritually as well revitalizing themselves [Lame Deer and Sarkis, The Lakota Sweat Lodge Cards]. The ritual is also intimately connected to the White Buffalo Calf Woman, who brought the Sacred Pipe to the Lakota people [Lame Deer and Sarkis, The Lakota Sweat Lodge Cards]. Historically, it was performed on the daily basis or before any great undertaking, such as a vision quest (*Hanblecheyapi*), a hunt, or the Sun Dance, to ensure the participants were spiritually pure and cleansed [Lame Deer and Sarkis, The Lakota Sweat Lodge Cards].

Architecture and Universal Symbolism

The lodge is built in a simple, well planned manner. The lodge is a small dome constructed from 12 or 16 bent willow saplings [Black Elk and Brown, The Sacred Pipe]. These flexible branches are tied together to form the shape of the building [Lame Deer and Sarkis, The Lakota Sweat Lodge Cards]. It can be interpreted from the literature that the lodge is highly symbolic, representing the entire universe and the womb of Mother Earth [Lame Deer and Sarkis, The Lakota Sweat Lodge Cards]. Sitting in the dark, warm, and small space of the lodge makes people feel safe and protected, which helps them heal their minds and feel like they are starting a brand new life [Bellows and Newman 1991, 313].

The objects used inside the lodge carry deep spiritual meanings. Heated stones placed in the central fire pit are called "Grandfathers," and they represent the indestructible, everlasting nature of *Wakan-Tanka* (the Great Spirit) and the Earth [Black Elk and Brown, The Sacred Pipe]. The sacred fire represents the life-giving power of *Wakan-Tanka* [Black Elk and Brown, The Sacred Pipe]. The Water poured over the rocks, which represents the Thunder-beings

[Black Elk and Brown, The Sacred Pipe]. This mix of water and heat creates a vital purifying steam known as "Grandfather's Breath" [Lame Deer and Sarkis, The Lakota Sweat Lodge Cards].

Talking about the layout of the lodge, it is very strict. The door of the lodge always faces east, it symbolises the direction from which the light of wisdom enters the lodge [Black Elk and Brown, The Sacred Pipe]. Outside the lodge sits the *Peta-owihankeshni* (the eternal fire / fire without end) where the rocks are heated prior to starting the spiritual ceremony [Black Elk and Brown, The Sacred Pipe].

The guiding philosophy of this ritual is the concept of *Mitákuye Oyás'ih*, which translates to "all my relations" [Bruguier, 2023]. This phrase is not just an ordinary greeting, but carries a deep animistic worldview stating that human beings are intimately related to all parts of creation—including the earth, animals, and plants—because everything comes from the exact same life source [Bruguier, 2023]. The ceremony reinforces the belief that human beings are just one part of a much larger, interconnected family [Lame Deer and Sarkis, The Lakota Sweat Lodge Cards].

Preparation and Safety Protocols

Preparing for the sweat lodge is considered a sacred act. Gathering the rocks (grandfathers), collecting wood, and building the fire are sacred rituals performed weeks in prior to the actual ceremony [Marsh et al., 2018]. There are significant physical risks associated with the sweat lodge, which include risk such as extreme heat, dehydration, and smoke inhalation [Marsh et al., 2018]. Therefore, it is critical that the ceremony remains protected and guided by a trained, recognized spiritual leader or Elder who knows how to mitigate the risks posed by the ceremony [Marsh et al., 2018].

Participants enter through the small door on their hands and knees. [Marsh et al., 2018]. The literature suggests that this act symbolizes a return to the womb and an expression of deep humility. [Marsh et al., 2018]. By crawling on the ground, people let go of their pride, making them receptive for spiritual cleaning and connecting deeply with the Creator [Lame Deer and Sarkis, The Lakota Sweat Lodge Cards]. The *Inípi* functions as a highly controlled environment for psychological and spiritual transformation. The combination of deprivation of senses for example the pitch-black darkness and intense heat stress helps to detach the mind from its narrow focus on the physical body and the individual ego [Lame Deer and Sarkis, The Lakota Sweat Lodge Cards]. Scholars suggest that this environment helps participants accept their pain, let go of inner struggles, and release their individual pride. [Sabucedo, 2017]. Finally, when the door flap is opened and light floods into the dark space, it symbolizes a rebirth in a spiritual sense. The participant leaves the lodge as if reborn, having let go of ignorance and ego, with a purified spirit and a renewed connection to the universe. [Black Elk and Brown, The Sacred Pipe].

The Ceremonial Process

The Four Rounds: The actual performance of the ceremony is highly structured. The Inipi ceremony is divided into four distinct stages, which are known as "doors" or "rounds" [Lame Deer and Sarkis, The Lakota Sweat Lodge Cards]. At the start of each round, heated stones are placed in the center of the lodge, and upon the heated stones the herbs and water are added to them, and the door is closed.[Lame Deer and Sarkis, The Lakota Sweat Lodge Cards]. After a period of intense heat, praying, and singing ends, the door flap is opened to mark the end of that specific round [Lame Deer and Sarkis, The Lakota Sweat Lodge Cards].

Darkness and Light: The use of darkness and light inside the lodge portray a deep spiritual notion that the ideas are directly supported by scholarly sources show that as soon as the door is closed, the lodge becomes completely dark, and this total blackness depicts the human ignorance and the dark, troubled state of the human soul [Marsh, 2018]. When the round ends and the door flap is thrown open, the light of the world pours back in. The returning light symbolizes spiritual awakening, bringing the light and wisdom of Wakan-Tanka (the Great Spirit) and removing the darkness of ignorance. [Black Elk and Brown, The Sacred Pipe].

Sacred Offerings: The ceremony uses several sacred items and offerings to facilitate healing. Ritual integrates the smoking of the sacred pipe, the singing of traditional songs, and the use of healing herbs like sweet grass, sage, and cedar [Marsh, 2018]. The specific herbs used in Inipi are placed onto the hot rocks to create fragrant smoke; sage is burned during smudging, to chase away negative spirits and heal physical illnesses like colds, cedar is used to bless the rocks, and sweet grass invites in positive spiritual energies [Lame Deer and Sarkis, The Lakota Sweat Lodge Cards]. The literature suggests that singing sacred songs together and passing the pipe brings the group together, creating a shared sense of unity and connection with the Creator [Lame Deer and Sarkis, The Lakota Sweat Lodge Cards].

Contemporary Healing and Mental Health Applications

In modern times, the Inipi has proven to be a highly effective clinical as well as therapeutic tool. Ideas directly supported by scholarly sources demonstrate that sweat lodge ceremonies used in traditional cultures have been successfully integrated with modern psychological treatment models, especially a program called "Seeking Safety" [Marsh, 2018]. This combined approach has treated Intergenerational Trauma (IGT) and Substance Use Disorders (SUD) together in Indigenous populations.[Marsh, 2018].

Interpretations drawn from the literature suggest that trauma causes individuals to self-medicate with substances to numb their pain. Combining modern safety-focused therapy with traditional spiritual cleansing gives people a much more holistic and dynamic way to finally face their past without needing drugs or alcohol [Marsh, 2018].

Sweat lodge healing power is not just changing how people think; it actually changes how their bodies feel. Ideas directly supported by scholarly sources explain that trauma resides in the physical nervous system, and inside the sweat lodge, the heat builds until people start sweating, crying, sometimes shaking. This is described as the body releasing trauma it had been holding onto [Marsh, 2018]. Also, the interpretations drawn from the literature note that the extreme physical discomfort and intense heat of the lodge force the mind to detach from its normal, everyday worries, thus creating a sudden as well as the deep connection with the spiritual world. [Lame Deer and Sarkis, The Lakota Sweat Lodge Cards].

Finally, the social setting of the lodge is also a vital component for mental health. Research shows Sweat Lodge Inipi ceremony participation helps build mental strength. Instead of fighting painful thoughts, people learn to accept them, which makes it easier for them to focus on making positive changes in their lives. [Sabucedo, 2017]. The shared challenging experience of the ceremony also strongly supports the building of group cohesion and trust in the tribal community [Marsh, 2018]. Interpretations drawn from the literature point out that severe trauma destroys a person's connections, causing intrusive thoughts, deep isolation and shame [Marsh, 2018]. The communal nature of the Inipi practice in the lodge helps participants break that isolation, process those intrusive thoughts safely, and reconnect with their culture, their community, their identity and the spiritual world [Marsh, 2018].

Svedana Karma in Ayurveda: Somatic Cleansing and the Unblocking of Micro-circulatory Channels (Srotas)

Ayurvedic practice of therapeutic heating is known as *Svedana* (sudation therapy). According to Varsha and Toshikhane (2022), this therapy triggers sweating to reduce physical stiffness (*Stambha*), heaviness (*Gaurava*), and coldness (*Sheeta*).” This therapy serves an essential role as a *Poorvakarma*—a prior or preparatory procedure conducted before the main, more intense cleansing treatments of *Panchakarma*. [Varsha & Toshikhane, 2022].

Guidelines for such treatment are rooted in Ancient Ayurvedic texts written in the early centuries of the Common Era [Wujastyk, 2021]. The *Charaka Samhita* classifies two types of *Svedana* based on the presence of fire, dividing it into *Sagni* (thermal methods using a direct heat source, like a steam kettle or hot bed) *Niragni* (non-thermal methods that generate body heat without external fire, such as intense exercise, fasting, or wearing heavy blankets) [Varsha & Toshikhane, 2022].

Alternatively, the other Ayurvedic text of *Sushruta Samhita* classifies the therapy into four specific types based on the medium used:

1. *Tapa sveda* (direct dry heat)
2. *Ushma sveda* (steam or moist heat)
3. *Upanaha sveda* (warm medicinal poultices)
4. *Drava sveda* (pouring warm liquids over the body) [Varsha & Toshikhane, 2022]

Unlike the *Inípi*, which is a shared and communal ritual, *Niragni Sveda* applies specific non-fire heat techniques to highly specific life stages. For example, *Gurupravarana* (thick covering of body with heavy clothing) is physiologically and therapeutically prescribed during menarche (a girls first menstrual period) and for three months postpartum (*Sutika Paricharya*) to remove excess *Kapha Dosha*

To function effectively, *Svedana* utilizes heat-inducing (*Ushna*) and deeply penetrating (*Tikshna*) medicines and environments to act on the body. [Varsha & Toshikhane, 2022]. When applied to the body, these hot and penetrating qualities enter the *Srotas* (the body's tiny microcirculatory channels) where these *Ushna* and *Tikshna* elements and conditions activate the sweat glands to increase perspiration thus more sudation [Varsha & Toshikhane, 2022]. Furthermore, therapies that utilize dry heat (*Ruksha Sveda*) actively promote widening of blood vessels caused by the relaxation of smooth muscle cells in their walls and stimulate local metabolic processes [Sutradhar et al., 2025]

Svedana functions as a sophisticated mechanical flush for the body. The application of *Ushna* (hot) and *Tikshna* (penetrating) properties works essentially to "melt" or liquefy *Ama*—the thick, sticky toxin that becomes trapped deep inside the body's tissues. Through sudation, the therapy forces these liquefied toxins out of the deep tissues and into the open *Srotas (channels)* so they can easily be expelled from the body [Sutradhar et al., 2025].

Fundamentally, this physical purification extends beyond mere relaxation; it serves as an essential, specific therapy to clear obstructed bodily pathways or channels and re-establish proper energetic circulation among the Psychic Centers or Chakras.

Science behind Thermal Purification

Extreme thermal stress in both *Svedana* and *Inípi* triggers profound responses. These responses are neuro-chemical and physiological. The extreme heat and unique sensory environment of the *Inípi* sweat lodge activate the pituitary gland, resulting the secretion of endorphins, the body's natural opioids [Bartholomew, 2018],. This neuropeptide

release results into the altered states of consciousness, analgesia, and emotional euphoria, which allows practitioners to discharge trapped traumatic energy through profound sweating and shaking [Marsh et al., 2018].

When it comes to Svedana, Ayurvedic Svedana utilizes heat (*Ushna*) in order to activate the sympathetic nervous system, promoting systemic vasodilation and increasing local blood flow (hyperemia) [Sutradhar et al., 2025]. The thermal application dilates microcirculatory channels (*srotas*). This liquefying deep-seated morbidities and facilitating their removal through the skin pores [Varsha and Toshikhane, 2022],.

Furthermore, Bartholomew (2018) argues that profuse sweating may result in the excretion of certain toxic elements, including arsenic, cadmium, lead, and mercury. However, it is to be noted here that the extent and clinical significance of sweat-mediated detoxification remain debated.

3. Research Gap

There is a difference between the Studies on Svedana with respect to studies on Lakota Inípi. Svedana mainly looks at its physical and therapeutic effects, while research on Inípi focuses more on spiritual meaning, purification, and rebirth. It is also to be noted that Inípi and Ayurveda understand heat differently. Inípi uses heat from stones, fire, and water to create a space, which is sacred, while Ayurveda uses external heat as well as internal ways of producing heat, such as exercise and fasting.

Fewer studies are present on the psychological effects of these practices, even though both involve heat, discomfort, and bodily change. This study addresses these gaps by comparing Inípi and Svedana as different systems of purification and healing. Very few studies look at both the physical and spiritual side of these practices together.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

This study adopts a qualitative comparative literature review with a focused thematic synthesis approach to examine the Lakota *Inípi* and Ayurvedic *Svedana*. Sources included Google Scholar, academic publications, and authoritative Lakota and Ayurvedic (Charaka/Sushruta) texts. Search terms included keywords such as “Lakota Inípi,” “sweat lodge,” “Ayurveda,” “Svedana,” “Svedana Karma,” “sudation therapy,” “purification,” “sweating ritual,” and “thermal healing.” ”

To ensure a comprehensive analysis that included both contemporary scientific studies and foundational anthropological/historical texts, the literature search was not restricted by a specific start year. The literature review published database is upto July 2026, it also includes selected classical texts and foundational works that are essential for understanding the two distinct traditions in their historical and cultural account. The inclusion criteria were designed to ensure that the study remains relevant and scholarly credible and easier to replicate. Sources were included if they directly discussed the physical, therapeutic, spiritual, or psychological dimensions of Inípi or Svedana, or if they provided a substantial comparative or contextual discussion of ritual heat, purification, embodiment, and healing.

Non-scholarly sources, passing mentions of heat therapy, and unrelated wellness practices. In total, approximately 34 sources were reviewed in the initial search, and 15 sources were finally selected for close analysis and citation in the paper. This selective approach was taken for culturally grounded comparison of two distinct traditions.

Literature analyzed three dimensions. The first examined the physical and therapeutic functions of heat and sweating. Second focused on their spiritual and symbolic meanings and context behind those practices. Third explored their psychological and transformative effects and how such rituals revitalise the human body.

This framework made it possible to analyse and compare the two traditions without collapsing them into one another or without placing one tradition in hierarchy over the other. Instead, the study reads the literature comparatively in order to show both shared features. I compared the shared physical practices of heat and sweating across both traditions. I found their beliefs, ritual meanings, and cultural settings were different, even when some practices looked similar.

Methodological Reflexivity and Positionality

This study recognizes that the Lakota *Inípi* cannot be read from the documents because it is a ceremony that is deeply embedded in Lakota cultural, spiritual, communal, and historical contexts.

The available literature is the secondary and popular source thus provides only a partial account; therefore, This study does not authoritatively speak for Lakota communities.

As non-Lakota researchers, we interpret elements like heat and water solely based on existing literature. Similarities with the Ayurveda practice of *Svedana* are therefore treated as points of comparison, not equivalence. The study also recognises the risk of reducing the *Inípi* to universal symbols or therapeutic techniques. Future research involving direct collaboration with Lakota scholars and community including the elders, and knowledge holders would provide a more culturally appropriate approach.

5. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS and DISCUSSION:

At the first instance, Lakota *Inípi* and Ayurvedic *Svedana Karma* appear to belong to entirely different worlds. *Inipi* is considered a sacred ceremonial practice rooted in Lakota spirituality, but when it comes to *Svedana*, the other is a therapeutic procedure, described within the classical Ayurvedic medical tradition. However, when these practices are examined more closely, their similarities become noticeable. Both intentionally expose the body to intense heat for sudation, and both understand this process as more than a simple physical reaction. Though lacking modern biology, ancient cultures universally used sacred thermal rituals for holistic healing.

In both traditions, heat is connected with the removal of unwanted conditions, the reduction of physical discomfort, and the preparation of the individual for deeper forms of healing or transformation. The use of heated stones and steam in the *Inípi* also creates an important yet interesting point of comparison with Ayurvedic procedures involving steam and therapeutic heat. At the physiological level, both practices can produce comparable responses, such as increased heart rate, changes in circulation, sweating, as well as the relaxation of muscles. However when it comes to the psychological level, staying in extreme heat means facing discomfort, building toughness, and feeling a great sense of relief when it's over.

These parallels make comparison possible. Similarity in bodily experience, it does not mean that the two practices have the same meaning. For example, The *Inípi* is tilted more towards spirituality, community, prayer, sacred beings, and ceremonial life, whereas *Svedana Karma* is understood through Ayurvedic lens which deals health, disease, balancing *dosha*, eliminating *Ama* through *srotas*, . Therefore, the comparison that follows does not make an attempt to claim that one tradition is equivalent to the other or one above the other, instead, it analyses how two culturally distinct traditions have developed different contexts and meanings around a shared human experience.

The purposes, procedures, concepts of purification, therapeutic or spiritual functions, and physiological and psychological dimensions are compared in the discussion further. The application of heat the Lakota Inípi and Ayurvedic *Svedana* practices is rooted in fundamentally different paradigms of health, knowledge, and human existence across two distinct cultures which are located on two different continents, very far from each other

The Lakota tradition operates on the philosophy of *Mitákuye Oyás'ij* ("All My Relations"), viewing the individual as part of a deeply interconnected universe. Inípi's heat is utilized to restore relational harmony between the individual, their community, the natural world, and the spiritual realm.

However it is to be noted that the Lakota knowledge is dynamic, oral, and land-based, passed down through traditional stories and direct connection to spiritual forces rather than written in the form textbooks. This communal wisdom is safeguarded by Elders and holy men, they protect this knowledge, guiding and judging a person's character and spiritual experiences. Inipi tradition deeply honours female power to heal and give life, as the foundational ceremony is gifted by figures like the White Buffalo Calf Woman (folklore).

In contrast, the philosophy and practice of Ayurveda treats the human body as a self-contained microcosm, where the health depends on maintaining a delicate internal balance among the Tridosha (*Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*). Ayurvedic knowledge written and preserved in ancient Sanskrit *Samhitas* (such as the *Charaka* and *Sushruta Samhita*), which systematically analyses and records physiological processes and treatments over thousands of years. Practitioners learn *Svedana* and other Ayurvedic practice by strictly following established historical texts.

The physical environments designed to contain heat clearly reflect two distinct goal of spiritual rebirth versus physical repair Lakota Inipi and Ayurveda *Svedana*

For Inípi Ritual, a dark dome made of bent willow branches and covered with animal skins or tarps is prepared. Inside this womb, participants crawl to experience a return to the "Womb of Mother Earth" (*Makhá*) and a concession to ignorance as the darkness overwhelms them. The heat is provided by the "Grandfathers" (heated rocks at the fire's center), which expel "Grandfather's Breath" ("Creator's Breath), another manifestation of the Creator, which emerges in the form of rising steam when water is poured over the rocks. Ayurvedic *Svedana* is practiced in a systematic way in a proper climate-controlled environment. A warm cabin (*Kuti*) or a hotbed (*Prastara*), which resembles a bright modern-day physiotherapeutic clinic, is used for the procedure. Instead of being subjected to natural elements, the patient is cared for with specialized equipment such as electric heating pads and infrared lamps. A mechanistic approach helps the therapist to manage body mechanics clinically. *Svedana* classifies heat in two categories: *Saagni* (heat produced by fire or an external source applied to the body, such as steam), and *Niragni* (internally generated heat, such as warming the body with blankets or physical exercises).

Both practices use extremely high temperatures to purge the body of toxins. The challenge of purging out unwanted materials addressed by both the rituals are different as the Inípi is a type of extended communal suffering, with the intense heat of the fire challenging the group's physical limits. This test allows the participants to shift their awareness from the individual to collective, to forget their ego and personal problems at least for a while whereas Individual suffering (physical, emotional) is the main target of *Svedana*, and the "cognitive defusion" from it is the critical healing edge. The extreme physical challenge of the Inípi is designed to facilitate "cognitive defusion" from the sufferings of the body, to detach from the body. Ayurveda views *Svedana* as a personalized *Poorvakarma* (preparatory therapy) to be used in *Panchakarma*. It uses the precise control of temperature according to the patient's needs. For

example, the application of Snigdha (wet) heat is recommended for Vata dosha, and Ruksha (dry) heat is used for Kapha dosha. The goal of Svedana in Ayurveda is strictly physical: To use the penetrating power of Ushna (warm) and Tikshna (sharp) qualities to act on the Srotas (physiological channels) to remove Ama (toxins).

Modern science can partially explain the mechanisms of Inípi and Svedana and the differences between them. The extreme stress from the physical or mental challenges of the Inípi causes the brain to release Endorphin, which numbs the pain receptors of the body, inducing eustress, analgesia, and overall euphoria. The participants of the Inípi are allowed to enter the realm of transpersonal meditation since the pain is replaced by Endorphin – a natural painkiller and a psychedelic substance. The altered state of consciousness is critical to entering the realm of spiritual healing.

On the other hand, the Ayurvedic Svedana is less interested in the effects on the mind. The controlled heat of the procedure causes dilatation of blood vessels, an increase in capillary permeability, and an overall rise in blood circulation. These physical changes promote metabolic turnover and facilitate the removal of the toxins from the body via the largest heat exchanger – the skin. The detoxification process itself makes the person lightweight and clears the body of harmful Ama.

Despite the differences in the theoretical concepts, both practices are similar in their effects on the human psyche, namely, the creation of a sense of "psychological flexibility." The ability to withstand stress without becoming overwhelmed by it defines the new level of freedom for the individual, who is now able to address their traumas, subconscious patterns, and behaviors, and ultimately transform them. The concept of flexibility is now an essential part of psychological therapy in general, and the Inípi is being integrated into it to help people with psychological trauma. Patients no longer need to undergo standard treatment in a white hospital – they can continue their healing, which is now supported by a professional counselor, in a familiar place, among familiar people.

In contrast, the Ayurvedic sweat therapy known as Svedana has found strong modern validation in the field of physical therapy as the modern day physiotherapists use tools like hot packs, steam chambers, and infrared radiation, which mimics the ancient Svedana techniques of applying moist or dry heat to the body. These heat applications deeply penetrate the tissues, increasing blood flow as well as relaxing tight muscles. Svedana is now utilized in musculoskeletal disorders such as osteoarthritis, back pain, and frozen shoulder by systematically reducing heaviness, pain, and joint stiffness.

However it is to be noted that bringing these powerful ancient practices into modern settings raises serious ethical concerns as well. As sweat bath rituals gain global popularity various Native American activists and scholars have strongly criticized the usage of native heritage, including sweat baths, by movements inspired by "New Age" spirituality. Native Americans and Critics view this phenomenon as a prolongation of new colonization and a direct violation of indigenous self-determination as they see it as theft to their culture. Now, distinguishing between authentic practices and modern commercialization in this capitalist society, scholars gave special emphasis to the rise of "neo-shamanism" and "plastic shamans," questioning the expropriation and commercialization of native cultures. Such commercialisation and delocalisation of their purification ceremony is considered as cultural genocide. Native Americans ask people and consumers if they want to use these practices ethically, modern practitioners must honor their original, sacred contexts; in other words it means working respectfully alongside traditional healers and Elders, rather than just stripping the rituals down to basic clinical tools for profit in the market.

6.CONCLUSION

This research aimed to identify similarities and differences between the Lakota Inípi and the Ayurvedic Svedana Karma. Practices use intense heat for rituals, though they have different underlying intentions behind the purpose. Moreover, the role of heat is not only physical since both the Lakota and Ayurveda cultures attribute symbolic meanings to various ritualistic procedures. The primary similarity between the Lakota Inípi and the Ayurvedic Svedana Karma is that they use extremely intense heat to induce certain physiological responses. For instance, it may be an endorphin-mediated response that causes altered states of consciousness or temporary vasodilation resulting in the body's natural detoxification.

Both traditions place participants in challenging environmental conditions for an extended period. They use physical discomfort to confront harmful behaviors and unresolved emotional suffering. Through this process, people are believed to recover from trauma while building resilience and inner strength. Although Inípi and Svedana Karma have similar mechanisms and effects on the human body, they are profoundly different in terms of meaning and intention. The purpose of the Lakota sweat lodge is to facilitate community healing and growth through connection and reciprocity, which is in alignment with the Lakota cosmology known as Mitákuye Oyás'íŋ. It emphasizes interconnectedness and is based on animism, meaning that all things – living and non-living, have a spirit. At the same time, Ayurvedic Svedana is a therapeutic procedure targeting specific physiological mechanisms in order to remove toxins from the body and restore the balance between doshas.

After comparing the two rituals, it is possible to conclude that they share similar mechanisms and effects on the human body, even though they come from different cultural traditions and philosophical systems.. By using heat to induce physiological responses, Inípi and Svedana Karma create an environment necessary for spiritual and emotional healing. This understanding allows the medical field to incorporate elements of these rituals into contemporary healthcare practice.

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