

Integrating Physical Education and Wellbeing into the Panchakosha

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the integration of principles from the Indian Knowledge Tradition (IKT), specifically the Panchakosha model, into contemporary physical education and wellbeing practices. The study is motivated by the limitations of modern education systems, which often prioritize academic achievement over holistic development, thereby neglecting physical vitality, emotional balance, and spiritual fulfillment. The primary objective is to critically explore how the five sheaths of the Panchakosha—Annamaya (physical), Pranamaya (vital energy), Manomaya (mental), Vijnanamaya (intellectual), and Anandamaya (bliss)—can provide a comprehensive framework to enrich modern pedagogical approaches. The research employs an interdisciplinary methodology, drawing from education, psychology, philosophy, and Ayurveda to conduct a theoretical analysis of the Panchakosha framework and its intersections with empirical studies in physical education and wellbeing. The results demonstrate a profound alignment: Annamaya Kosha is nurtured through physical fitness and nutrition; Pranamaya through breathwork and mindful movement; Manomaya through emotional regulation and stress reduction; Vijnanamaya through scientific understanding and critical thinking; and Anandamaya through joyful movement and community connection. The study concludes that the Panchakosha model offers a robust, holistic paradigm for education. By integrating this ancient wisdom with modern empirical evidence, the paper proposes practical strategies for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers to foster the comprehensive development of individuals. This approach cultivates not only cognitive skills but also physical health, emotional resilience, and inner stability, ultimately equipping learners to excel in all dimensions of life and contribute to more thriving, cohesive communities.

Keywords: IKT (Indian Knowledge Tradition), Panchakosha (Five Sheath), Annamaya Kosha (Physical Sheath), Pranamaya Kosha (Vital Energy Sheath), Manomaya Kosha (Mental Sheath), Vijnanamaya Kosha (Intellectual Sheath), and Anandamaya Kosha (Bliss Sheath)

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been an increasing global acknowledgment of the significance of holistic education, which not only cultivates intellectual development but also promotes physical fitness and emotional wellbeing (Miller, 2019). This recognition underpins the imperative need to integrate traditional epistemologies, which have in the past emphasized interconnectedness among the mind, body, and spirit (Tilak, 2020). In this sense, the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) is extremely important due to its vast collection of spiritual revelations, philosophical insights, and useful knowledge for advancing human welfare (Joshi, 2021). Among many dimensions of IKS, the concept of Panchakosha emerges as an important framework that encompasses the very essence of physical education and wellbeing. The concept of Panchakosha, derived from the ancient Indian texts of the Vedas and Ayurveda, describes the five layers or sheaths of existence that make up an individual: Annamaya Kosha (Physical Sheath), Pranamaya Kosha (Vital Energy Sheath), Manomaya Kosha (Mental Sheath), Vijnanamaya Kosha (Intellectual Sheath), and Anandamaya Kosha (Bliss Sheath) (Upanishads, as cited in Saraswati, 2002). Each of these sheaths plays a significant role in the development of the health and wellness of an individual. The Panchakosha framework, despite its profound insights, has a significant lacuna in terms of its application within contemporary educational paradigms, especially in relation to physical education and wellbeing. Its holistic dimensions, as manifested in the Panchakosha, are often overlooked by the modern educational system, which tends to focus on academic achievements and cognitive development (Sharma & Gupta, 2022).

This research paper attempts to fill this gap by exploring the integration of physical education and wellbeing principles emanating from the Panchakosha into modern educational practice. By integrating ancient Indian wisdom with modern scientific input, this study aims to demonstrate how methodologies based on the Panchakosha can offer several advantages in fostering holistic health and wellbeing among learners (Saraswati, 2002; Sharma & Gupta, 2022). The research employs an interdisciplinary approach that draws from education, psychology, philosophy, and traditional Indian sciences to provide practical insights for practitioners, educators, and policymakers dedicated to a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to education (Joshi, 2021; Tilak, 2020). By applying the timeless wisdom of the Panchakosha within modern educational contexts, this study seeks to nurture individuals who are intellectually competent, physically strong, emotionally resilient, and spiritually enriched (Miller, 2019). In the following sections, this research undertakes an academic exploration of the profound intersections between the ancient wisdom of the Panchakosha and the contemporary need for holistic education and wellbeing. It is hoped that the present study will contribute to the ongoing discourse on reimagining education in ways that respect the full spectrum of human potential and promote the flourishing of individuals and societies alike.

Physical Education and Wellbeing

Physical education (PE) assumes a pivotal function in enhancing holistic well-being by promoting physical engagement, cultivating healthy behaviors, and facilitating social and emotional growth. It serves as a key determinant in nurturing overall health by addressing physical, mental, and social dimensions of wellness (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020). The following delineates the contributions of physical education to overall well-being:

Physical Fitness: Physical education courses afford students the opportunity to participate in a variety of physical endeavors including athletics, recreational games, and structured exercises. Consistent involvement in PE is instrumental in augmenting cardiovascular health, muscular strength, flexibility, and comprehensive physical fitness. Establishing a robust foundation in physical fitness can mitigate the likelihood of chronic diseases, obesity, and other health-related concerns (U.S. Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion [ODPHP], 2021).

Mental Health: Engagement in physical activity has been correlated with enhancements in mental health and emotional stability. Involvement in PE can alleviate stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms through the release of endorphins, which are endogenous substances that elevate mood. Furthermore, PE classes furnish students with the means to cultivate resilience, self-esteem, and adaptive coping mechanisms through collaborative teamwork, goal formulation, and the navigation of challenges (Biddle & Asare, 2019).

Lifelong Habits: Physical education fosters the establishment of enduring practices associated with physical activity and wholesome living. By imparting the significance of regular exercise and movement from an early age, PE classes assist students in creating healthy routines that can be sustained throughout their lives, thereby yielding improved long-term health outcomes (Bailey et al., 2021).

Social Skills: PE classes create environments conducive to student interaction with peers in a nurturing and inclusive context. Through team sports, collaborative games, and collective activities, students acquire vital social competencies encompassing communication, cooperation, leadership, and teamwork. These interpersonal abilities are crucial for forging relationships, resolving conflicts, and collaborating effectively across diverse settings (Casey & Goodyear, 2015).

Healthy Lifestyle Choices: Physical education classes present avenues for students to comprehend the significance of making prudent lifestyle decisions, encompassing appropriate nutrition, adequate sleep, hydration, and effective stress management. PE educators can illuminate the perils of sedentary behaviors, substance misuse, and detrimental habits, thereby empowering students to make informed choices that bolster their overall well-being (WHO, 2020).

Panchakosha

The concept of Panchakosha, or the five sheaths, is derived from ancient Indian philosophical literature referred to as the Upanishads, which are integral to the Vedanta tradition. These texts delve into the essence of existence,

consciousness, and the self. The Panchakosha framework delineates the strata or sheaths that surround the true self, identified as Atman, and signify various dimensions of human existence (Saraswati, 2002; Paijwar, Awasthi, & Mishra, n.d.).

The five koshas are:

Annamaya Kosha (Physical Sheath): The outermost layer, Annamaya Kosha, symbolizes the physical body. By promoting physical fitness, health, and well-being via activities like exercise, sports, and nutrition, physical education directly relates to Annamaya Kosha. The foundation of holistic well-being is a healthy physical body (Cronkleton, 2020).

Pranamaya Kosha (Vital Sheath): Pranamaya Kosha holds the energy or life force (prana) that gives the body vitality. Breathwork (pranayama), mindfulness, and aerobic exercises are examples of physical education practices that help regulate prana. These practices boost energy, reduce stress, and promote overall health (Journal of Ayurvedic and Holistic Medicine, 2024).

Manomaya Kosha (Mental Sheath): This sheath includes the mental and emotional parts of a person. Physical education and wellness practices have a profound impact on the Manomaya Kosha by improving mental health, emotional regulation, and cognitive function. Engaging in physical activities can alleviate stress, enhance mood, and improve mental clarity and concentration (Biddle & Asare, 2019).

Vijnanamaya Kosha (Intellectual Sheath): Vijnanamaya Kosha signifies intellect, wisdom, and discernment. Physical education promotes intellectual development by imparting knowledge regarding anatomy, physiology, biomechanics, and nutrition. Comprehending the scientific underpinnings of physical activity empowers individuals to make educated choices regarding their health and fitness (Paijwar et al., n.d.).

Anandamaya Kosha (Blissful Sheath): This innermost layer represents the state of bliss or joy that arises from deep connection and satisfaction. Physical education and wellness practices can induce feelings of joy, fulfillment, and connectedness by promoting activities that provide pleasure, enable flow experiences, and cultivate a sense of purpose and belonging (Cronkleton, 2020).

The Panchakosha represents an ancient Indian model encompassing philosophy, science, arts, and health. Nonetheless, the amalgamation of physical education and wellness within the Panchakosha continues to be an insufficiently examined area in contemporary scholarship (Journal of Ayurvedic and Holistic Medicine, 2024).

Integration of Physical Education and Panchakosha

Physical education and wellbeing can be linked to the Indian knowledge tradition by integrating them with the concept of *Panchakosha*, which represents the five sheaths or layers of existence according to Vedantic philosophy. Among these, the *Annamaya Kosha* and *Pranamaya Kosha* are most directly associated with physical and energetic dimensions of health and education.

Annamaya Kosha (Physical Sheath)

The integration of Annamaya Kosha, representing the physical sheath, within the domains of physical education and holistic wellbeing underscores the critical significance of fostering the corporeal form through various dimensions, including nutrition, physical exertion, and comprehensive physical health.

Annamaya Kosha can be integrated into physical education and wellbeing as follows:

Nutrition Education: Students can be instructed on the pivotal role of balanced dietary practices, highlighting the advantages of whole foods such as fruits, vegetables, proteins, and healthy fats. Teaching portion control, meal planning, and nutritional literacy helps facilitate optimal health and energy maintenance.

Physical Fitness Activities: A well-designed physical education curriculum incorporating activities like running, swimming, yoga, Pilates, strength training, and team sports can significantly improve cardiovascular fitness, muscular strength, joint flexibility, and endurance.

Regular physical activity is proven to reduce the risk of chronic illnesses and premature death (Warburton & Bredin, 2006) and is endorsed by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) for its wide-ranging health benefits.

Body Awareness and Posture: Educating students on correct body mechanics, alignment, and posture can prevent injuries and enhance physical functioning. Such education also promotes mindfulness of one's bodily state, resonating with Annamaya Kosha's principle of physical awareness.

Mindful Movement Practices: Mindful movement practices such as Tai Chi, Qigong, or mindful walking augment body awareness and coordination. They also strengthen the mind-body connection and alleviate stress, improving both physical and mental health (Cramer et al., 2018).

Comprehensive Holistic Wellness Approach: Programs integrating physical activity with emotional regulation, stress management, and interpersonal skill development nurture lifelong habits of health and balance. This approach reflects the Annamaya Kosha's focus on the physical body as the foundation for holistic wellness.

By embedding the principles of *Annamaya Kosha* into physical education and wellbeing curricula, individuals cultivate an understanding of how lifestyle choices and physical practices influence their overall health and vitality. This methodology nurtures lifelong dedication to holistic wellness and empowers individuals to make informed decisions that bolster their physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing.

Pranamaya Kosha (Vital Sheath)

The Pranamaya Kosha, recognized as the vital sheath, emphasizes the regulation of life energy (*prana*) through breath control, mindfulness, and energy management. Integrating this layer into physical education enriches wellbeing by linking physiological, emotional, and cognitive domains.

Pranamaya Kosha can be incorporated into physical education as follows:

Breathing Exercises (Pranayama): Techniques such as deep diaphragmatic breathing, alternate nostril breathing, and kapalabhati enhance oxygenation and reduce stress. Scientific reviews confirm that pranayama has measurable physiological and psychological benefits (Saoji, Raghavendra, & Manjunath, 2019).

Mindful Movement Practices: Including yoga, Tai Chi, or Qigong in PE curricula reinforces the interrelation between breath, movement, and consciousness. Slow and mindful breathing positively affects autonomic balance and mental calmness (Russo et al., 2018).

Energy Awareness and Management: Teaching students the significance of breath and life energy (*prana*) fosters self-regulation and awareness of internal states. Although *prana* is rooted in traditional Indian philosophy, related modern research on breath-based interventions supports its stress-modulating potential (Saoji et al., 2019).

Stress Reduction and Relaxation: Practices such as mindfulness meditation, guided imagery, and progressive muscle relaxation can mitigate anxiety and enhance mood. Controlled breathing interventions have been found effective in reducing negative affect and improving wellbeing (Zaccaro et al., 2020).

Holistic Wellness Perspective: A holistic approach integrating physical, mental, and emotional aspects of health aligns with Pranamaya Kosha's core idea that balanced energy flow sustains vitality and overall wellness.

By incorporating the Pranamaya Kosha framework within physical education, students gain an understanding of the breath-body nexus and cultivate a balanced, energized lifestyle that supports their physical, emotional, and cognitive wellbeing.

Manomaya Kosha (Mental Sheath)

The incorporation of Manomaya Kosha, representing the mental sheath, within physical education and wellness initiatives necessitates a comprehensive examination of the psychological and emotional dimensions of health to enhance overall wellbeing.

Manomaya Kosha may be assimilated into physical education as follows:

Mind-Body Connection: It is imperative to underscore the intricate relationship between physical activity and psychological health by providing students with an understanding of the advantages of exercise in relation to mood enhancement, stress alleviation, and cognitive performance (Priyadarsini, 2024). Encourage students to observe how physical movement influences their cognitive processes, emotional states, and overall mental condition.

Emotional Regulation Skills: Instruct students in methodologies for emotional regulation and stress management including deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, and mindfulness exercises. For example, a study found that brief mindfulness psychoeducation improved emotional regulation among physical-education/coaching students. (Isnarizana & Nursaba, 2025)

Positive Psychology Principles: Integrate tenets of positive psychology into physical education curricula: focus on resilience, gratitude, optimism, goal-setting, growth mindset, and acknowledging accomplishments—thereby cultivating a constructive mental perspective and sense of wellbeing.

Social Interaction and Support: Foster social engagement and peer support in physical education environments to augment students' feelings of belonging, connection, and emotional wellness. Participation in team sports, group exercises, and collaborative activities affords opportunities for cooperation, communication, and interpersonal-skill development—mediating mental health outcomes of activity. (White et al., 2024)

Mindfulness and Meditation Practices: Embed mindfulness and meditation practices into physical education curricula to assist students in fostering present-moment awareness, concentration, and cognitive clarity. Studies show mindfulness in a PE context reduces cognitive-load stress and enhances performance. (Kong et al., 2025)

Through the integration of *Manomaya Kosha* principles into PE and wellness programmes, individuals may cultivate a profound comprehension of the interdependence between physical activity and psychological health.

This holistic methodology promotes resilience, emotional regulation, and comprehensive psychological wellbeing, thereby empowering students to flourish both physically and mentally.

Vijnanamaya Kosha (Intellectual Sheath)

The incorporation of *Vijnanamaya Kosha*, the intellectual sheath, into the realms of physical education and wellness practices necessitates the cultivation of intellectual development, critical analysis, and a scientific comprehension of the human body along with its physiological functions.

The integration of Vijnanamaya Kosha into physical education is feasible through several methodologies:

Scientific Understanding of Physical Activity: Educators should impart knowledge regarding the scientific foundations of physical activity, exercise physiology, biomechanics, and nutrition. This approach facilitates a profound understanding among students of how the body works, and how different forms of exercise, training modalities and nutrition influence bodily responses.

Evidence-Based Methodologies: It is essential to underscore the importance of evidence-based methodologies and empirical research findings within PE and wellness initiatives. For instance, systematic reviews show mediators like self-esteem, self-efficacy and physical self-worth in the relationship between physical activity and mental health. (White et al., 2024) Students should be encouraged to critically assess health-related data, fitness trends, and prevalent misconceptions to make judicious choices regarding their lifestyle practices.

Health Literacy: Promotion of health literacy is essential — equipping individuals with the knowledge and competencies to evaluate, interpret, and utilise health information to enhance their physical and mental wellbeing. A study among college students found higher health literacy was significantly associated with healthier behaviours. (Rueda-Medina et al., n.d.) Instruction should focus on guiding students in identifying trustworthy information sources, scrutinising health assertions, and making decisions grounded in empirical evidence about their health behaviours.

Problem-Solving and Decision-Making Competencies: Integrate problem-solving and decision-making into PE curricula by presenting authentic scenarios and case studies relevant to health, fitness, and wellness. Students evaluate situations, consider diverse perspectives, and formulate actionable plans to tackle health-related dilemmas.

Critical Thinking and Reflective Practices: Enhance critical thinking and reflective practices by prompting students to scrutinise their physical-activity routines, lifestyle choices, and wellness aspirations. This strategy helps them evaluate the efficacy of their approaches, identify potential areas for improvement and make necessary adjustments based on empirical evidence and feedback.

By embedding the principles of *Vijnanamaya Kosha* within physical education and wellness curricula, individuals are poised to cultivate a more profound intellectual appreciation of health and fitness concepts, thereby empowering them to make informed decisions and adopt evidence-based practices to optimise their physical and mental well-being. This pedagogical approach fosters a commitment to lifelong learning and encourages students to assume an active role in the stewardship of their health and lifestyle decisions.

Anandamaya Kosha (Blissful Sheath)

The incorporation of *Anandamaya Kosha*, the blissful sheath, into physical education and wellness practices necessitates the promotion of joy, fulfilment, and a profound sense of connection with oneself and others through physical engagement.

The principles of *Anandamaya Kosha* may be assimilated into physical education as follows:

Joyful Movement: Encourage individuals to partake in physical activities that elicit joy, excitement, and a profound sense of fulfilment. Provide a diverse array of options such as dance, sports, outdoor recreation, adventure-based activities to accommodate varying interests and preferences.

Mindful Enjoyment: Cultivate mindfulness and present-moment awareness during physical activities in order to facilitate students' complete immersion in the experience and enhance their appreciation of the sensations associated with movement. Encourage recognition of the beauty of nature, the rhythm of their breath, and the bodily sensations experienced during exertion.

Flow State Experience: Create opportunities for students to attain "flow" states — characterised by profound concentration, effortless performance, and a perception of timelessness during physical endeavours. Structure challenges and activities that align with students' skill levels and provide explicit goals to facilitate flow experiences and enhance enjoyment.

Expressive Arts Integration: Incorporate expressive arts such as music, dance, drama, and visual arts into physical-education curricula to enhance creativity, self-expression, and emotional wellbeing. Motivate students to explore various forms of artistic expression as a pathway to connect with their intrinsic joy and creativity.

Community and Connection: Promote a sense of community and connection within physical-education environments by encouraging teamwork, cooperation, and mutual support among students. Facilitate opportunities for collaborative activities, group challenges, and team-building exercises to cultivate belonging and camaraderie.

Gratitude and Appreciation: Inspire students to develop gratitude and appreciation for their bodies, abilities, and the opportunities to engage in physical activity. Help them recognise the privilege of movement, play, and the joy of physical expression, irrespective of skill level or performance.

Through the integration of *Anandamaya Kosha* principles into physical-education and wellness programmes, individuals may experience physical activity as a source of joy, connection, and personal fulfilment. This methodology promotes holistic wellbeing by nurturing the mind, body, and spirit, and encourages students to cultivate a lifelong appreciation for the transformative potential of movement and physical expression.

CONCLUSION

Panchakosha presents a conceptual framework for comprehending the multifaceted dimensions of existence, which encompass the corporeal body (Annamaya Kosha), the vital life force (Pranamaya Kosha), cognitive functions (Manomaya Kosha), the realm of intellect (Vijnanamaya Kosha), and the state of bliss or spiritual essence (Anandamaya Kosha) (Satpathy, 2018).

Moreover, the focus on mental health, emotional fortitude, and comprehensive development within physical education resonates with the Manomaya Kosha and enhances overall psychological well-being. The incorporation of mindfulness methodologies, techniques for stress alleviation, and activities aimed at character development within the physical education curriculum caters to the Vijnanamaya Kosha, thereby nurturing intellectual advancement and self-awareness (Pandey & Mishra, 2021).

In the realm of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), Panchakosha elucidates a significant philosophical framework that pertains to physical education and holistic well-being. IKS embodies the traditional wisdom and practices of India that have been transmitted across generations, integrating principles derived from Yoga, Ayurveda, and various ancient methodologies (Jadhav, Jadhav, & Vidhate, 2025).

The construct of Panchakosha, denoted as the “Five Sheaths,” offers a comprehensive insight into human existence, which is congruent with the holistic paradigm advocated within IKS. This framework recognizes the interdependence of the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual facets of individuals (Satpathy, 2018).

In the domain of physical education, the assimilation of IKS principles, inclusive of those associated with Panchakosha, can culminate in a more holistic approach to well-being. Techniques such as Yoga, which focus on physical postures (Annamaya Kosha), breath regulation (Pranamaya Kosha), and mental concentration (Manomaya Kosha), simultaneously contribute to physical fitness and psychological wellness (Pandey & Mishra, 2021).

Furthermore, the doctrines of Ayurveda, an integral aspect of IKS, underscore the necessity of harmonizing the body and mind for attaining optimal health. By embedding Ayurvedic principles within physical education curricula—such as the formulation of personalized exercise regimens based on individual constitutions (Prakriti)—educators can customize methodologies to address the unique needs of students, thereby enhancing their overall well-being (Jadhav et al., 2025).

In summary, the integration of IKS principles, including the framework of Panchakosha, within physical education allows educators to furnish students with a more holistic approach to well-being that encompasses not only physical fitness but also mental, emotional, and spiritual health. This alignment cultivates a profound comprehension of the interconnectivity of human existence and promotes a more all-encompassing approach to education and wellness.

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