

Research Paper

## Anchored Within: A Holistic Educational Framework for Student Mental Health through Indigenous Psychology

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### ABSTRACT

The mental health of students in India has become increasingly worrisome; however, existing interventions are based on Western psychological constructs, which may lack cultural appropriateness. This paper envisages Yoga Sūtra, The Pancha Kosha Model, and The Integral Yoga as theoretical frameworks as well as a grounding imperative to Indigenous Psychology that propagates a non-clinical holistic approach to psychology from the perspective of Indian Knowledge systems (IKS), to reimagine mental health as a transformative inner experience. The study uses textual analysis, policy mapping, and review of the empirical literature to outline an IKS-based mental health framework for education. Consistent with national policy, it provides culturally relevant resources for teachers, curriculum developers, and student advocates.

**Keywords:** *IKS, Student Mental Health, Indigenous Psychology*

The mental health of students has become a global concern with the increasing prevalence of anxiety, depression, and emotional dysregulation at both school and university levels (NIMHANS, 2016). While interventions largely rely on biomedical or Western psychosocial frameworks, we have increasingly recognized that these frameworks cannot fully capture cultural understandings of sensitivity or inner aspects of well-being.

In a country like India, with multitudes of traditions of self-cultivation, the alienation of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) from formal education processes has led to a chasm between the existential struggles of students from different walks of life and what resources they have at their disposal for inner healing.

One untapped resource is the Yoga Sūtra of Patañjali, an ancient Indian psychological treatise that describes a systematic method for mental clarity, moral anchoring, and emotional transformation. Presenting this text within the practice of Indigenous Psychology provides a culturally compatible non-clinical approach to working with the inner worlds of students. Indigenous psychologies are those alternative psychologies that are based on indigenous philosophies, spiritualities, and epistemologies and provide us with differing

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concepts of mind, self, and suffering from those that are distinct from dominant Euro-American models (Marsella, 2009).

This article discusses how the Yoga Sūtra—along with its extensions in Integral Yoga (Sri Aurobindo & The Mother, 2003), and modern IKS-consistent pedagogies—can be leveraged to reimagine the mental health education in India. Analysing the ideas of *chitta-vṛtti-nirodha*, *kleśas*, vis-à-vis psychological resilience, the research is intended to build an IKS-based framework for student mental health. In so doing, it responds to policy lacunae identified in national policy (Ministry of Education, 2021; NEP, 2020) and takes a stand for yogic psychological tools to be included in the curriculum as preventive, transformative, and context-oriented mental health interventions.

### ***Philosophical Foundations***

The paper is based on the conceptual framework provided by Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) such as the Yoga Sūtra of Patañjali, Pancha Kosha model, and some specific constructs from Integral Yoga as formulated by Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. These models provide us with native views of mind, awareness, emotional distress, and personal transformation.

Dating from 200 BCE to 400 CE, the Yoga Sūtra theorises that 'psychological distress' (*duḥkha*) is born of an undisciplined mind (*vṛttis*) and 'unconscious conditioning' (*kleśas*), and counsels *citta-vṛtti-nirodha*—the cessation of such fluctuations—as the way to 'clarity of being' (Patañjali, trans. Bryant, 2009). Its eight limbs (*ashtanga yoga*) are as much a spiritual guidebook as a system of psychological healing to moral principles, body postures, breath, cultivation of awareness, and meditation. The Pancha Kosha model furthers this structure with five interpenetrating layers of human experience: the physical (*annamaya*), vital (*prāṇamaya*), mental/emotional (*manomaya*), intellectual (*vijñānamaya*), and bliss (*ānandamaya*) sheaths (Kapoor & Singh, 2005). Translated to education and well-being, the model implies an integrative practice involving body, breath, mind, and self-awareness simultaneously. In his Integral Yoga, Sri Aurobindo stresses self-realisation through education that integrates the whole being-- the physical, vital, mental, psychic and spiritual (Sri Aurobindo, 2004). This gives us a vision of education not only as one of conveying information, but of a process of inner transformation.

Collectively, these native models create a multifaceted lens for reimagining mental health as not the lack of disease but as the development of inner harmony, ethical discernment, and self-knowledge. They provide philosophical foundations for a culturally situated and developmental-oriented alternative to prevailing biomedical and behaviourist practices in student well-being paradigms.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The state of mental health of students has been demarcated for attention in India in the recent past, especially with increasing academic stress, emotional burnout, and identity-related distress across ages (NIMHANS, 2016). While there are recent psychological paradigms with empirical support (e.g., CBT and Positive Psychology), many of these stem from Western philosophy and epistemology and hence have limited cultural appeal in an Indian context (Garg, 2025).

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As a response, researchers have moved towards Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), and especially Yoga-based interventions, to develop culture-specific models of psychological well-being. Pramod (2024) carried out an empirical study demonstrating that practicing yoga lowered anxiety and depression symptoms in college students significantly and proved that short-term interventions may even strengthen emotional resilience. Mahesh (2023) similarly reported results in his observational study, identifying improvement in stress and concentration among students after practicing yoga regularly. The Pancha Kosha model has been investigated as a holistic development framework. Research by Kulkarni and Ashok (2023) and Satpathy (2018) underscored its significance in academic environments by correlating the five levels of human being—physical, energetic, mental, intellectual, and blissful—to quantifiable performance measures such as attentiveness and emotional well-being. Likewise, Deshmukh (2020) and Jakhar (2019) underscored the use of kosha-based models within pedagogical approaches, facilitating multi-layered learner development. The philosophical base of Yoga psychology, particularly through Patañjali's Yoga Sūtras, has been interpreted as a complete system of mental regulation, offering concepts like *citta-vṛtti-nirodha* and *kleśas* as internal mechanisms for understanding and reducing suffering (Bryant, 2009; Beloved, 2021). Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga, as expounded by Sri Aurobindo & The Mother (2003), brings an evolutionary spiritual component to education, seeking not just mental equilibrium but psychic development and purpose alignment. Educational implementation of the same has been expounded in school campuses like Chinmaya Vidyalayas (Deshmukh, 2020) and in policy papers like the NEP 2020 and NCFTE 2009, which recommend value-based, holistic, and IKS-integrated learning.

Likewise, the WHO-CC and Kaivalyadhama (2020) reports recommend integrating yoga into formal school programs based on quantifiable psychological benefits.

In contrast to these varied findings, the practical implementation of IKS as school-based mental health interventions is underdeveloped.

Despite this variety of views, the extent to which IKS-oriented mental health approaches are translated into recommendable IKS education-based mental health practices is underdeveloped.

### ***Research Gap***

Despite the growing amount of literature that confirms the mental health benefits of Yoga-based practices and highlights the philosophical richness of Yoga philosophy under IKS, such as Yoga Sūtra, Pancha Kosha, and Integral Yoga, a major gap still exists between theory and its application in the educational domain. Even though some studies offer empirical evidence of the benefits of yoga for student wellness, however, these are intervention studies or philosophical reviews, respectively. Very few studies provide a structured, education-compatible approach to incorporate these Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into the national curricula as sustainable and culturally situated mental health practices. Also, national-level policy documents call for an integration of IKS but miss usable models at the curriculum level grounded in Indigenous Psychology. The void emphasizes the requirement to conduct research that goes beyond validation and starts to operationalize IKS constructs as formal frameworks for student mental health education in India.

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### ***Research Question***

- How can Indian Knowledge Systems, in specific the Yoga Sūtra of Patañjali, the Pancha Kosha framework, and the Integral Yoga, be systematically made part of educational systems to cater to student mental health in one's own culture, policy, and developmentally sensitive way?

### ***Research Objectives***

- To examine psychological constructs in the Yoga Sūtra and how these may apply to mental health.
- To investigate how paradigms such as Pancha Kosha and Integral Yoga promote holistic student development.
- To identify limitations in current mental health interventions for students, particularly concerning cultural relevance.
- To evaluate the alignment of educational policies with Indian Knowledge Systems for mental wellness.
- To propose a culturally rooted mental health framework for educational institutions based on the Yoga Sūtra and related IKS traditions.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study employs a qualitative, conceptual research design grounded in textual analysis and document-based inquiry. The primary method involves a critical examination of classical texts, policy documents, and contemporary academic research to explore how the Yoga Sūtra, the Pancha Kosha Model, and the Integral Yoga as an Indigenous psychological framework can inform culturally aligned approaches to student mental health in India.

### ***Data Sources***

The study draws upon the following data categories:

- Core Philosophical Works: 1) Yoga Sūtra of Patañjali, 2) Integral Yoga by Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, 3) Pancha Kosha model as presented in Indian Knowledge System (IKS) texts.
- Primary reports: NIMHANS National Mental Health Survey (2016), Kaivalyadhama report on youth well-being, WHO-related documents.
- Policy Documents: NCF 2005, NCFTE 2009, National Education Policy 2020, Guidelines for Student Health and Well-being, and MOE's mental health framework.
- Scholarly works: Research publications in peer-reviewed journals and conference proceedings about Indigenous Psychology, Yoga-based mental health models, and education.

### ***Analytical Framework***

The analysis uses an interpretive approach grounded in Indigenous Psychology theory. Concepts from the Yoga Sūtra (e.g., chitta-vṛtti-nirodha, ashtanga yoga, kleśas), The Pancha Kosha Model, and The Integral Yoga are identified and cross-mapped with policy language and student mental health indicators from empirical reports. Comparative textual analysis is used to:

- Identify thematic convergence between IKS frameworks and psychological resilience.
- Evaluate policy readiness for the integration of these models, and
- Construct a conceptual model for an educational application.

### ***Limitations***

As a conceptual paper, this article does not require field work or surveys of students or institutions. Rather, it draws on secondary data sources, and its power is framework synthesis, and it is designed to guide future empirical work and curriculum design.

## **FINDINGS, ANALYSIS, AND APPLICATION**

This section will examine how the Yoga Sūtra, the Pancha Kosha model, and Integral Yoga can form a culturally coherent framework that can be used to understand and transform student mental health in India. This detailed examination of philosophical paradigms, psychological processes, and policy imperatives will thus show how Indian Knowledge Systems can be implemented as a preventive and transformational framework within the education system in India.

### **1. Reinterpreting Mental Health Through the Yoga Sūtra**

At the core of the Yoga Sūtra itself is the belief that psychological distress arises from *vṛttis*—the wave-like patterns of the mind—becoming entangled with ego (*asmitā*), craving (*rāga*), aversion (*dveṣa*), and fear (*abhiniveśa*).

These afflictions (*kleśas*) reflect the psycho-social stressors of the students: pressure to perform, identity confusion, fear of failure, and emotional instability (Bryant, 2009; NIMHANS, 2016). Patañjali's definition—"yogaś citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ"—implies that wellness is achieved not through external achievement, but through inner mastery of thought and emotion (Patañjali, trans. Beloved, 2021). Whereas other models locate emotions in separate compartments or pathologize distress as a disorder, the Yoga Sūtra sees the mind as both the location of suffering and the instrument of its end. This gives power to students by giving not just the capability to diagnose but agency: mindfulness, restraint, thoughtfulness, and disengagement are choices available to anyone, regardless of socioeconomic status or clinical availability.

Educationally, this redefinition creates a new avenue: instead of seeing students as at-risk entities in need of correction, they are conceptualized as aware beings who can transform themselves through systematic inner work. Courses that incorporate yoga, breathwork, and ethical inquiry have proven effective for enhancing self-regulation and diminishing disruptive behaviors among adolescents (Kaivalyadhama, 2020; Narayan, 2023).

### **2. Pancha Kosha Model for Holistic Wellbeing**

The Pancha Kosha model of the Taittiriya Upanishad, and described in IKS texts, gives a multi-level model of human experience—body (*annamaya*), vital energy (*prāṇamaya*), mind (*manomaya*), intellect (*vijñānamaya*), and bliss (*ānandamaya*) (Kapoor & Singh, 2005). In contrast to Western theories that give cognitive processes priority, Pancha Kosha theorizes that imbalances at any one level influence overall health. For example, an unhealthy dietary regime (*annamaya*) might affect emotional reactivity (*manomaya*), whereas a lack of purpose (*ānandamaya*) might be evidenced by depression or apathy.

In school, this model demands multi-dimensional instruction: physical training incorporating movement and breathing, emotional education incorporating self-reflection, and intellectual stimulation incorporating self-esteem and inner drive. It also encourages early identification of distress as not "misbehaviour" but a sign of deeper misalignment. Chinmaya Vidyalayas

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and a few CBSE schools have started piloting kosha-synchronized educational modules, with heightened sensitivity and less aggression (Deshmukh, 2020).

Used in mental health training, the Pancha Kosha model might be used as a diagnostic and growth tool, allowing schools to craft interventions that develop every level of the student—physically, energetically, mentally, intellectually, and spiritually.

### **3. Beyond Pathology: Indigenous Alternatives to Western Models**

The prevailing psychological paradigms in school systems—particularly in international and urban schools—are based on cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), positive psychology, and DSM-based diagnosis. Although helpful, these models have a tendency to externalize the locus of distress and focus more on changing behaviour than on spiritual transformation. They also ignore the ethical, metaphysical, and cultural aspects of suffering, which are integral parts of Indian worldviews (Marsella, 2009).

As opposed to it, Yoga psychology identifies distress as a natural result of unconscious living—a disconnection from one's inner truth. Exercises like *pratyāhāra* (withdrawal from sensory distraction), *dhyāna* (concentrated meditation), and *samyama* (unified concentration) are techniques that facilitate the return to wholeness of fragmented awareness. These practices promote self-awareness rather than self-judgment and provide young people with a route toward meaning, rather than management.

In addition, Sri Aurobindo and The Mother's Integral Yoga positions education as a waking up of the psychic being—the interior, unchanging essence of the pupil. This fundamentally departs from outcome-oriented education. It does not regard depression as a sickness, but as a signpost: an indication that one is out of touch with inner aspiration. Incorporating Integral Yoga in the curriculum is to educate students to watch out for their impulses, direct their will, and harmonize with a higher purpose. This kind of education is preventive, redemptive, and empowering by nature (Sri Aurobindo, 2004).

### **4. Institutional Readiness: Bridging Theory and Policy**

The need for integrative, culture-centered approaches to mental health is not only philosophical, but policy actively encourages it. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is intended to promote the integration of Indian Knowledge Systems and socio-emotional learning (Ministry of Education, 2020). The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 advocates value-based education and contextuality, and the NCFTE (2009) emphasizes the holistic development of the child.

However, these policies lack an articulated implementation plan. Most mental health initiatives have yet to adopt borrowed paradigms. The IKS-based systems offered by the Yoga Sūtra, Pancha Kosha, and Integral Yoga fill this policy vacuum. They offer an implementable, scalable, and culturally valid alternative with the promise to harmonize with India's national vision while enhancing youth mental health.

Further, a few of the studies conducted at Kaivalyadhama (Kaivalyadhama, 2020), NIMHANS (NIMHANS, 2016) have reported that IKS-based interventions, when applied can enhance the school climate, decrease the discipline problems, and strengthen the emotional resilience. Consequently, at the policy-practice nexus, India is now philosophically, empirically, and institutionally supportive of IKS mental health models.

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### 5. A Framework for Indigenous Psychology in Education

This part synthesizes the theoretical, empirical, and policy-based knowledge discussed in the paper into an integrated, actionable framework that reimagines mental health education for students using the conceptual framework of Indigenous Psychology. In particular, it situates the Yoga Sūtra of Patañjali, the Pancha Kosha model, and the Integral Yoga as core psychological systems that not only resonate with the civilizational ethos of India but can be made consonant with contemporary educational settings.

In the place of treating student mental health as a collection of disorders to diagnose and treat, this framework focuses on inner development, ethical clarity, regulation of emotions, and self-knowledge—objectives that are firmly rooted in yogic and indigenous practices. By doing so, the framework shifts mental health discussion in educational settings from a reactive biomedical model to a preventive value-based and integrative one. It also fills long-standing policy loopholes by concretizing abstract IKS recommendations in NEP 2020, NCF 2005, and NCFTE 2009 into practical curricular and pedagogical approaches.

#### *Domains of the Framework and Their Applications*

Domain	IKS Construct	Educational Application
<b>Physical Regulation</b>	<i>Asana</i>	Practice mindful movement and physical postures in PE, promoting kinaesthetic awareness, posture correction, and sensory grounding. These improve mental calm and reduce physical anxiety symptoms.
<b>Ethical Development</b>	<i>Yama, Niyama</i>	Inculcate reflective ethics modules based on Satya, Ahimsa, Tapas, and Santosha (respectively meaning, truth, non-violence, austerity, and contentment) through stories, classroom practices assembly. These constitute the foundation of emotional regulation and interpersonal harmony ethics.
<b>Breath &amp; Emotion</b>	<i>Prāṇāyāma</i>	Teach strategies for controlling the breath during classroom transitions and wellness times. Slow breathing and nadi shodhana have been shown to reduce test anxiety and improve the regulation of self.
<b>Attention Training</b>	<i>Dhāraṇā, Dhyāna, Samyama</i>	Introduce quick meditative or concentration-building activities before exams, in the morning assembly, or during mindfulness exercises to increase attention, mindfulness, and mental stability.
<b>Multi-layered Wellness</b>	<i>Pancha Kosha</i>	Educate teachers to examine behavioral and emotional issues through a five-sheath framework (body, energy, mind, intellect, bliss). This allows for multi-faceted wellness programming that addresses the entire child, rather than exterior manifestations.
<b>Inner Aspiration</b>	<i>Integral Yoga</i>	Provide environments for introspection, life purpose contemplation, and journaling to awaken the interior psychic self. Activities may range from directed introspection, vision boards, or values-based career studies that align students with inner drives.

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### ***Curricular and Institutional Integration***

This system can be modularly integrated at different levels of schools and boards:

- CBSE/State Boards: Incorporate modules in Value Education or Life Skills time slots.
- NEP-aligned schools: Incorporate it in a new-age interdisciplinary curriculum emphasizing socio-emotional learning and experiential pedagogy.
- Teacher Training: Teacher education courses (D.El.Ed., B.Ed.) need to incorporate IKS-based mental health modules, utilizing Yoga Sūtra-based role plays and case studies. Educate teachers to examine behavioral and emotional issues through a Pancha Kosha or five-sheath framework (body, energy, mind, intellect, bliss). This allows for multi-faceted wellness programming that addresses the entire child, rather than exterior manifestations.
- Certification of Counselors: School counselors may be certified in this system through collaborations with institutions such as Kaivalyadhama, NIMHANS, and NCERT.
- Evaluation & Monitoring: Establish assessment rubrics to monitor progress in ethical development, emotional self-regulation, and attention based on non-clinical measures rooted in indigenous models.

### ***Transformative Potential***

Placing the Yoga Sūtra, Pancha Kosha, and Integral Yoga in the category of Indigenous Psychology does not merely provide an alternative but refocuses Indian education back within its philosophical foundation, provides solutions for today's struggles with exam stress, peer pressure, identity conflict, and emotional dysregulation. In contrast to the traditional behaviourist or pathological models, this approach:

- Empowers the learner to take an active role in their inner transformation.
- Redesigns education as an inner transformation, rather than merely an external accomplishment.
- Complies with policy and international best practices for comprehensive education.
- Reinstalls cultural continuity in mental health discussions, instilling respect for indigenous knowledge while adhering to empirical expectations.

Finally, this model is not an additional practice but a revolution. It invites teachers, policy makers, and curriculum developers to reimagine mental health within educational environments, not as a crisis to be acted upon in reaction, but as an opportunity for engaged transformation, built on India's knowledge system.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

There is no doubt that the challenges posed by the rising incidence of mental health problems among students in India call for a new way of thinking about how we perceive, conceptualize, and foster mental health in education.

As revealed in this research, the Yoga Sūtra, the Pancha Kosha Model, and The Integral Yoga, if read as an Indigenous Psychology framework, offer something more than a series of practices; rather, they offer a richly cohesive, philosophically grounded system of inner transformation. Unlike traditional models of mental health that label mental suffering as disease, the Yoga Sūtra and parallel Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) view suffering as a

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chance for chitta-vṛtti-nirodha—encountering mental distress through moral order, breath control, self-inquiry, and intellectual luminance.

The Pancha Kosha model enhances this by charting the holistic architecture of human experience, inspiring educational strategies that cultivate the physical, energetic, emotional, intellectual, and blissful dimensions of a student's existence. Integral Yoga, especially as developed through the writings of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, raises education to the level of a process of psychic development and soul awakening. In combination, these traditions provide an energizing counter-narrative to behaviourist or clinically focused youth mental health approaches.

Policy guidance like the National Education Policy (2020), NCF (2005), and NCFTE (2009) creates the normative space for the inclusion of such Indigenous psychologies. Yet, operational models for implementations are missing. This study addresses this deficiency by suggesting a realistic, theory-grounded Indigenous Mental Health Framework for Education, grounded in the Yoga Sūtra, framed by the Pancha Kosha and Integral Yoga, and synchronized with national policy mandates.

### ***Recommendations***

Based on findings and analysis, the following recommendations are made:

- **Curricular Integration of Yoga Psychology:** Implement modules on Yoga Sūtra, ethics (yama-niyama), and meditative practices under Life Skills, Moral Science, or Value Education. Focus on self-regulation, reflection, and internal awareness.
- **Teacher Education in IKS-Based Mental Health:** Adapt teacher training curricula (particularly D.El.Ed. and B.Ed.) as per the Indian psychological framework, drawing from Yoga, Pancha Kosha, and Integral Education, so that teachers become skilled to model and facilitate psychological well-being.
- **Policy Implementation Tools:** Amplify NEP and NCF guidelines for comprehensive education into actionable steps: classroom practices, wellness periods, daily breathwork/mindfulness practices, and coordination with physical education.
- **Collaboration:** Collaborate with Kaivalyadhama, the NIMHANS, and AYUSH to develop textual and experiential mental health resources based on indigenous psychological principles of IKS for educational purposes.
- **Research and Evaluation:** Support for long-term studies assessing the benefits of yoga-based and Pancha Kosha-focused regular practices in emotional intelligence, academic performance, and psycho-behavioural outcomes in pupils would be the need of the hour from an educational perspective.
- **Digital Access to Indigenous Psychology Resources:** Create accessible digital materials—animated modules, dual-language guides, and interactive apps—that translate the teachings of the Yoga Sūtra, Pancha Kosha, and Integral Yoga into pertinent and applicable concepts for students from linguistic and geographical backgrounds.
- **Final Reflection:** Mental wellness is not just the lack of sickness but the presence of internal congruence, self-knowledge, and ethical discernment. The Yoga Sūtra, Pancha Kosha, and Integral Yoga collectively present India with a system that is not only ancient but urgently pertinent. When placed within formal education, they provide students with a way to understand their minds, relate to their emotions, and

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discover deeper meaning. In a time of rising anxiety, identity confusion, and systemic pressure, these IKS models return us to the first principle of healing: that well-being begins within.

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### ***Conflict of Interest***

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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