

“The Indian Knowledge System and Mental Health: Integrating Ancient Wisdom into Modern Mental Health Practices”

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Abstract:

The rich tapestry of ancient Indian knowledge systems and their profound insights into mental health are the focus of this article. Indigenous knowledge systems that have evolved over thousands of years on the Indian subcontinent are referred to as Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS). The foundational elements of IKS, which integrate physical, mental, and spiritual well-being, are classical Indian texts such as the Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, and Ayurvedic treatises like the Charaka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita. Mental health, a crucial component of overall wellbeing, has been considered and practiced in many cultures. The integration of the mind, body, and soul is emphasized in ancient Indian knowledge systems, which offer a holistic viewpoint. In order to provide a thorough understanding of mental wellness, this article attempts to connect traditional wisdom with modern mental health paradigms.

Keywords:

Indian Knowledge System, Mental Health, Veda, Gita, Ayurveda, Yoga

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Introduction

“Duhkhesv Anudvigna-Manah Sukhesu Vigata-Sprihah, Vita-Raga-Bhaya-Krodhah Sthita-Dhir Munir Uchyate”

(One who is not disturbed by happiness and distress and is steady in both is certainly eligible for liberation.)

(Bhagavad Gita, Prabhupada, 1986)

India has long been a treasure of diverse knowledge traditions that address the body, mind, and soul in an integrated framework. The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) provides a rich and deep understanding of mental health and well-being emphasizing balance among mind, body and soul. In contrast to the biomedical model, IKS emphasizes balance, interconnectedness, and self-realization as core components of psychological well-being. The Indian Knowledge System (IKS), comprising religious, philosophical, medical, spiritual, and cultural practices, offers a holistic view of mental health that is gaining increasing recognition in contemporary psychological discourse.

This article explores the rich heritage of ancient Indian knowledge systems and its profound insights into mental health. Drawing from foundational texts such as the Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Yoga and classical Ayurvedic tractates like the Charaka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita, we delve into holistic approaches that intertwine physical, psychological, and spiritual well-being. The integration of these systems into contemporary mental health frameworks offers an encouraging path toward culturally sensitive, preventive, and integrative care. This paper aims to bridge ancient wisdom with contemporary mental health paradigms, offering a comprehensive understanding of mental wellness.

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS)

“In Indian tradition, the four *Vedas*, 108 *Upanishads*; the six orthodox systems such as *Purva-Mimansa*, *Uttar-Mimansa (Vedanta)* *Samkhya*, *Yoga*, *Nyaya*, and *Vaisesika*; the two heterodox systems- *Jainism* and *Buddhism*; *Dharma Sastra*, *Grhya Sutras*, *Puranas*, *Ramayana*, *Mahabharat*, *Ayurveda*, *Samhita* and others are the repertoire of indigenous knowledge and constitute **indigenous psychologies**. These are the Wundt’s “mental products”, created by the ancient seers and sages, which serve as valuable lenses to understand the **Indian psyche**.”

(Rao, et al., 2008, p. 20)

Indian Knowledge System (IKS) refers to the indigenous and native systems of knowledge developed in the Indian subcontinent over thousands of years. These knowledge traditions are not merely academic or theoretical but are embodied, experiential, and aimed at inner transformation. These systems include: Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagwat Gita, Ayurveda, Yoga etc.

Mental Health in Indian Religious and Philosophical Thoughts

“Besides interesting reading, many of the concepts (of IKS) are still relevant and can be used in day-to-day practice especially towards healthy and happy living. Certain concepts are surprisingly contemporary and valid today. They can be used in psychotherapy and counselling and for promoting mental health.”

(Abhyankar, 2015)

Mental health, encompassing emotional, psychological, and social well-being, is a core aspect of overall health and well-being. It has been a subject of contemplation and practice in various cultures. While modern psychiatry has made significant strides, ancient Indian knowledge system presents a holistic perspective and offers profound insights into mental well-being, emphasizing integration, harmony, and balance between the mind, body, and soul. These systems offer valuable insights that can complement modern mental health approaches, fostering a more comprehensive understanding of psychological well-being. This article delves into the rich tapestry of Indian philosophical and medical traditions, exploring their relevance to contemporary mental health paradigms.

Conceptual Foundations of Mental Health in Ancient India

Mental health is being re-evaluated in the light of holistic and culturally grounded models, which were previously defined within the biomedical framework of Western psychology. With a millennium-long history of treating spiritual and mental suffering, Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) provide an integrative and complementary viewpoint. These systems provide distinct perspectives on the human mind, suffering, and liberation **(Rao, 2011)**.

The Concept of Mental Health in Indian Thought

Health is defined in nuanced ways in ancient Indian texts. In the Yoga Sutras, Patanjali defines health as the best use of one’s mental, emotional, and physical abilities to preserve balance with oneself and refrain from an excessive focus on the outside world **(Verma, 1979)**. Similarly, the Sushruta Samhita describes the parameters of health, with a focus on a harmonious state of the soul, senses, and mind (Prasannatmanendriyamana), normal body tissues (Samadhatu), healthy digestion (Samagni), equilibrium of bodily humours (Samdosha), and proper excretion (Malakriya) **(Verma, 1979)**.

Indian systems view psychological disorders as disturbances in the dynamic balance between the physical body (sharira), mind (manas), intellect (buddhi), and spirit (atman), in contrast to Western paradigms that frequently localize mental illness in neurobiology. According to the Ayurvedic model, manasika rogas (mental diseases) can result from imbalances in the tridoshas of vata, pitta, and kapha **(Sharma, 2017)**.

The Indian Knowledge systems define mental health as a dynamic balance between the self (Atman), the body (Sharira), the mind (Manas), the intellect (Buddhi), and the environment (Prakriti). Key concepts relevant to mental health include:

The Triguna Theory

Triguna theory is central to Indian psychology, which states that the mind comprises three qualities: Sattva (purity, harmony), Rajas (activity, passion), and Tamas (inertia, ignorance). Sattva promotes clarity and peace; Rajas leads to activity and restlessness; Tamas results in inertia and confusion (**Abhyankar, 2015**).

The balance among these gunas determines an individual's mental state, behaviour and personality. An imbalance in these Gunas, can lead to psychological disturbances. A sattvic state is conducive to mental clarity and peace, while excessive rajas or tamas can result in anxiety, agitation, or depression (**Misra & Mohanty, 2002**). Thus, Sattva is important for mental well-being (**Balodhi, 1984**).

The Tridosha Concept

The concept of Tridosha (Vata, Pitta, and Kapha), introduced by Ayurveda, explains physiological and psychological tendencies. Imbalances in these doshas (biological energies) can lead to both physical and mental disorders. Understanding an individual's doshic constitution allows for personalized interventions to restore balance (**Abhyankar, 2015**).

Chitta Vrittis

In Yoga, mental disturbances are seen as fluctuations of consciousness, which can be calmed through ethical living, breath control, meditation, and detachment. Thus, mental disorders, in IKS, are understood not as isolated brain diseases but as manifestations of deeper disbalances within the person's lifestyle, emotions, thoughts, and social connections (**Abhyankar, 2015**).

Therapeutic Systems within IKS

Ancient Indian texts provide nuanced therapeutic practices and techniques to flourish and understand mental health. Mantras, such as Om or the Gayatri Mantra or Mahamrityunjaya, are believed to carry vibrational energy that calms the nervous system, reduces stress hormones, uplifts consciousness and promotes a deep sense of connectedness with higher self. Researchers have found that regular chanting of these Mantras reduces heart rate, cortisol levels, stress, anxiety and depression (**Telles et al., 2010**).

Emotional catharsis, key protective factors in mental health can be provided by engagement in devotional activities and rituals. Bhakti and community rituals offer a sense of belonging, and existential meaning of life. Poetry, dance, and music

were examples of artistic expressions that served as therapeutic modalities in addition to being forms of entertainment. Participating in these artistic endeavours promoted cognitive stimulation, stress reduction, and emotional expression, all of which improved mental health in general (Scribd, 2025). The importance of family and community support for mental health was acknowledged by ancient Indian society. People felt less alone and distressed when they had a sense of purpose and belonging to spiritual mentors, collective activities, and community rituals (Balodhi & Chowdhari, 1986).

Therapeutic Systems within IKS are as the following:

Vedas

Ancient Indian texts known as the Vedas provide a variety of mental health-related lessons and practices. In addition to practices like meditation, prayers, and sacrifices for mental peace, these include ideas like balancing the three gunas (satva, rajas, and tamas) and the three humors (vayu, pitta, and kapha) (Godbole, 2022). The Vedas emphasize on the significance of preserving equilibrium among the body's three humours and gunas. Vedic texts state that an imbalance in these can lead to mental disorders and instability. In Vedic psychology, pranayama, or breath control, is a crucial technique that is thought to help focus, lower stress, and regulate the body and mind. Another crucial technique for developing mental calm and clarity is meditation (Shrivastava, & Sharma).

“Utarna,” a type of transference in which negative psychological symptoms are transferred to other objects or beings, is one of the psychotherapeutic techniques for self-improvement and achieving mental well-being that are described in the Atharva Veda (Rangaswami, 2021).

The Upanishads

The Upanishads provide a comprehensive framework for comprehending the mind and how it affects mental health, seeing it as a potent instrument for both emotional upheaval and wisdom. In order to achieve mental stability and tranquillity, they stress the significance of self-awareness, mental discipline, and the realization of the Self (Atman) or Brahman (Menon, 2025).

The nature of the self (Atman) and its relationship to the universe (Brahman) are extensively explored in the Upanishads. For example, the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad highlights how a person's behaviour shapes their character: “**As one acts, so does he become.**” “**One becomes bad by bad action, and virtuous by virtuous action**” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad). This emphasizes the importance of deliberate behaviour and how it affects one's mental and spiritual well-being.

According to the Upanishads, the mind is a complex being that can be taught and managed rather than just being a byproduct of the brain. The word “Chitta” refers to the mind, which includes the subconscious in addition to thoughts and feelings. The Upanishads stress the value of teaching the mind to stay composed, attentive, and distraction-free. The Upanishads examine a number of mental states, such as Samadhi, deep sleep, dreaming, and wakefulness. Realizing the Self, or Brahman, is a concept that can result in deep peace and liberation and is frequently mentioned as a step on the path to mental well-being **(Rawat, 2025)**.

The Upanishads provide instructions on how to achieve wisdom, which is regarded as a crucial aspect of mental toughness, and overcome suffering. The concept of well-being and happiness (Ananda) is often linked to connecting with nature and one’s inner self, as described in the Upanishads. The Upanishadic teachings can be seen as relevant to modern mental health in several ways **(Menon, 2025)**.

The focus on mental training and attaining a state of serenity and concentration aligns with contemporary mindfulness and meditation practices. Modern approaches to self-awareness and self-reflection are consistent with the emphasis on self-knowledge and the investigation of various states of consciousness. For those who struggle with stress and anxiety, the Upanishads provide guidance on how to overcome obstacles and discover purpose in life. By emphasizing wisdom and the capacity to overcome suffering, people can develop resilience and mental fortitude, which will help them deal with life’s challenges. With their ancient roots in Indian philosophy, yoga and meditation are becoming more and more popular complementary therapies for mental health conditions **(Rawat, 2025)**.

The Bhagavad Gita

With an emphasis on self-awareness, equanimity, and a focus on duty rather than results, the Bhagavad Gita provides helpful advice for managing mental health. It can be thought of as a psychotherapy model, especially for people who are experiencing emotional upheaval, stress, or anxiety. The conversation between Krishna and Arjuna shows how introspection and words can result in significant transformation.

Important Ideas and How They Affect Mental Health: Sama’s equanimity: Regardless of the situation, the Gita promotes keeping a balanced state of mind. By fostering inner peace, this can aid in lowering stress and anxiety.

Self-Awareness: It is essential for mental health to recognize one’s temperament and act accordingly. The Gita emphasizes how crucial it is to recognize and embrace one’s actual self rather than attempting to change who you are **(Joshi, & Sahu, 2023; Prabhu, 2024)**.

The Gita places a strong emphasis on carrying out one's responsibilities without worrying about the outcome. This can assist people in shedding the emotional burden of desiring particular results and shifting their attention from the end goal to the process. Practices that can lessen anxiety and depression are closely related to the Gita's teachings on mindfulness and meditation. Frequent practice can make people more conscious of their thoughts and feelings, which will help them better control them. The Gita exhorts people to disassociate themselves from the outcomes of their deeds. People can break free from the hold of stress and anxiety by concentrating on carrying out their responsibilities with commitment and sincerity **(Prabhu, 2024)**.

The Gita can assist people in improving their emotional regulation abilities by fostering composure and duty-oriented thinking.

Increasing Self-Awareness: The Gita challenges people to consider their feelings and ideas, which can help them gain a better grasp of their own mental terrain. People can become more resilient in the face of adversity by realizing who they are and carrying out their responsibilities with commitment. Even in the midst of chaos, people can find inner peace and calm by applying the Gita's teachings on mindfulness and detachment **(Joshi, & Sahu, 2023)**.

Krishna and Arjuna's conversation exemplifies the transformational potential of words and introspection. One way to view the Gita is as a therapeutic dialogue that aids people in processing their feelings and gaining understanding of their mental health **(Joshi, & Sahu, 2023; Prabhu, 2024)**.

Ayurveda

Ayurveda, known as the “**science of life**” or “**science of longevity**”, is a prominent part of India's rich and diverse knowledge system. Ayurveda, *an Upaveda (sub-Veda) of Atharva Ved*, aims for long-term well-being. This holistic approach to healthcare views life as a balance of mental, spiritual, and physical aspects. Ayurveda's roots are deeply embedded in the Vedic traditions. The principles and practices of Ayurveda are documented in ancient Vedic texts, such as the Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, and Ashtanga Sangraha **(Pandey and Tiwari, 2015)**.

Ayurveda focuses on preventive measures to maintain health, including lifestyle recommendations, dietary guidelines, and herbal remedies. Ayurveda integrates various aspects of life, including diet, lifestyle, mental well-being, and spiritual practices, to achieve overall health and well-being. Ayurveda is not just a medical system; it's also a way of life that incorporates ethical and spiritual principles, guiding individuals towards a healthy and fulfilling life **(Pandey and Tiwari, 2015)**.

Ayurveda offers a holistic approach to mental health. The integration of body, mind, and spirit is central to Ayurvedic healing. It identifies mental disorders like Unmada (insanity) and Bhutonmada (spirit possession) and prescribes treatments combining herbal remedies, dietary regulations, lifestyle modifications, and spiritual practices (**Charaka Samhita**).

Ayurvedic psychiatry (Manas Roga Chikitsa) addresses mental illness through herbal medicine, diet, behavioral regulation (achara rasayana), and spiritual practices. Ayurvedic texts like Charaka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita document classifications and treatments for conditions akin to psychosis (unmada), epilepsy (apasmara), and affective disorders (**Sharma, 2017**).

Yoga

Yoga is an integral part of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS). The Indian Knowledge System (IKS), a broad and comprehensive compilation of traditional knowledge that spans many fields, including philosophy, science, and the arts, includes yoga as a fundamental component. One important component of IKS is yoga, which emphasizes mental, physical, and spiritual well-being and provides a comprehensive strategy for self-realization and health. The origins of yoga can be found in ancient Indian writings such as the Patanjali Yoga Sutras, the Vedas, and the Upanishads. The philosophical and practical underpinnings of yoga practices are found in these texts (**Tiwari, 2023**).

Yoga promotes harmony and balance by highlighting the connection between the body, mind, and spirit. It includes techniques like pranayama (breath control), asanas (postures), and dhyana (meditation). Beyond just improving physical fitness, yoga promotes self-awareness, mindfulness, and ethical behaviour; all of which are essential components of Indian knowledge.

Ayurveda, which emphasizes natural healing, and Vedanta, which investigates the nature of reality and the self, are two IKS practices that are frequently combined with yoga. Understanding yoga's origins in IKS is essential to maintaining its authenticity and optimizing its advantages for people and society as its popularity grows worldwide (**Tiwari, 2023**).

Yoga, encompassing physical postures (asanas), breath control (pranayama), and meditation (dhyana), aims to harmonize the body and mind. Regular practice enhances mental clarity, reduces stress, and fosters emotional resilience. Meditation, in particular, is emphasized in texts like the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita as a means to attain inner tranquility and self-realization (**Patanjali's Yoga Sutras**).

The eightfold path (Ashtanga Yoga) described in Patanjali's Yoga Sutras is meant to help people achieve self-realization and mental purification. It has been

demonstrated that regular asana, pranayama, and dhyana practice improves mood, lowers anxiety, and increases cognitive control (**Streeter et al., 2010**). It is now widely acknowledged that practices like yoga, pranayama, and dhyana (meditation) can improve neuroplasticity and emotional regulation while lowering anxiety, depression, and PTSD (**Tiwari, 2023**).

Buddhist Psychology

Buddhist principles also provide a framework for understanding and regulating mental well-being, helping individuals develop a greater sense of self-awareness and control over their reactions to difficult experiences. Buddhism and mental health are interconnected through practices like mindfulness meditation, emotional regulation and compassion, which can lead to reduced stress, anxiety, and depression, and improved overall well-being. (**Greenstein, 2016**).

Buddhist techniques like mindfulness meditation and vipassana help in the development of emotional regulation and metacognitive awareness. These ancient Indian traditions are the origins of contemporary psychological interventions such as Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), Contemplative Psychotherapy (**Kabat-Zinn, 2003**). These meditation techniques, which have their roots in Buddhist traditions, promote awareness and composure and have been shown through neuroscientific research to help reduce stress and heal trauma (**Nan Tien Institute of Higher Education, 2025**).

Additionally, Buddhist practices can encourage acceptance of challenging feelings and situations. People can develop resilience and emotional well-being by learning to handle difficult circumstances without resistance by developing a sense of acceptance. The Buddhist idea of karma places a strong emphasis on individual accountability and the results of our deeds. This can encourage a sense of agency and control over one's life by enabling people to take proactive measures toward positive change. By acknowledging mental illness as a normal aspect of human experience rather than a sign of weakness or moral failing, Buddhism has historically contributed to the de-stigmatization of mental illness (**Common, 2021**).

Buddhism places a strong emphasis on developing empathy for both oneself and other people. More empathy and understanding may result from this, strengthening bonds and lessening feelings of loneliness and isolation. A framework for comprehending the nature of suffering and its causes can be found in Buddhist teachings on the Four Noble Truths. People can learn techniques for lowering attachments and fostering composure by realizing that cravings and attachments are frequently the source of suffering. For those who are experiencing feelings of

emptiness or despair, Buddhism offers a framework for discovering meaning and purpose in life (**Greenstein, 2016**).

Buddhism provides a wealth of knowledge and techniques that may improve mental well-being. People can find meaning and purpose in life, lessen suffering, and increase their emotional resilience by practicing mindfulness, compassion, and understanding. These techniques complement conventional approaches to mental health care and can be incorporated into a variety of therapeutic modalities (**Common, 2021**).

Contemporary Relevance and Integration

An estimated 197 million Indians are thought to be affected by mental illnesses, indicating that the country's mental health burden is still rising (**National Mental Health Survey of India, 2016**). Accessibility, cultural congruence, and stigma reduction are issues that can be addressed by incorporating IKS into clinical practice. Ayurvedic counselling, Integrative Yoga Therapy, and community-based interventions based on bhakti and ritual are examples of models that can add cost-effective, meaningful methods to traditional treatment (**Rao & Paranjpe, 2008**). Stress, anxiety, and depression are among the mental health issues that are becoming more prevalent worldwide. Indian knowledge systems provide ageless resources such as:

- Accessible and reasonably priced, particularly in rural and communal areas,
- Culturally appropriate for Indian communities, which helps to lessen stigma,
- Comprehensive, assisting with contemporary pharmaceutical and psychotherapy interventions.

The following ideas from ancient Indian knowledge systems provide important context for modern approaches to mental health:

- Holistic Treatment: More thorough care may result from treating the patient as a whole, body, mind, and spirit.
- Preventive Focus: Stressing dietary changes, lifestyle adjustments, and consistent exercises like yoga can help delay the onset of mental illnesses.
- Personalized Care: Tailored interventions are made possible by the identification of individual constitution types (Prakriti).

Conclusion

The Indian Knowledge System provides timeless insights and profound framework for understanding and nurturing mental health. Particularly in promoting resilience, purpose, and spiritual well-being, its integrated, preventative, and self-empowering methodology can complement and enhance contemporary psychiatry. A more compassionate and integrated approach of care, may be possible if these

indigenous systems are revisited and revitalized in light of the global mental health crisis. We can create the foundation for a more comprehensive and successful approach to mental health by incorporating these ideas with contemporary therapeutic techniques.

Ancient Indian knowledge systems' profound understanding of the human psyche and emphasis on harmony provide timeless insights into mental health. By combining these concepts with modern therapeutic methods, we can lay the groundwork for a more thorough and effective approach to mental health.

Indian Knowledge Systems provide a comprehensive, ethically sound, and spiritually enlightening framework for understanding and treating mental health. Incorporating these native indigenous traditions into contemporary psychology and psychiatry not only honours cultural background but also increases opportunities for flourishing and enhancing well-being in an increasingly globalized world.

Culturally sensitive frameworks, empirical research, and interdisciplinary collaboration are necessary for integrating IKS into mental health care. Organizations such as India's research centres and the Ministry of Ayush are actively attempting to connect traditional knowledge with contemporary science.

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