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Indian Knowledge System (IKS) in Human Well-Being: Philosophical Foundations, Scientific Dimensions, and Contemporary Relevance

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Abstract

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) extends a comprehensive framework for human well-being by integrating physical health with psychological balance, ethical values, social responsibility, ecological and spiritual harmony. Ancient Indian texts such as the Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Ayurveda Samhitas, and Yoga Sutras - as a part of IKS, conceptualizes human well-being is a state of dynamic equilibrium between body, mind, wisdom, society, and nature. Unlike modern biomedical models, the IKS approach is systemic, preventive, personalized, and value-based living. This paper explores the Tridosha characteristics, comparison between IKS and modern health models, philosophical foundations of well-being in IKS, its medical and psychological frameworks, lifestyle sciences, ethical-social dimensions, ecological insights, and contemporary scientific validation. The study argues that integrating IKS principles with modern interdisciplinary research can significantly contribute to sustainable human well-being, education, knowledge and global health strategies.

Keywords: Indian Knowledge System, Human Well-being, Ayurveda, Yoga, Holistic Health, Panchakosha, Sustainable Living, Integrative Medicine

Introduction

The concept of human well-being has studied significantly through medicine, psychology, sociology, and economics. Modern biomedical systems largely focus on disease treatment rather than holistic prosperity. In contrast, the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) conceptualizes well-being as a state of complete harmony encompassing physical vitality, mental clarity, emotional stability, moral integrity, social harmony, and spiritual realization. IKS does not treat health as merely the absence of disease but as a balanced state of physical vitality, mental clarity, moral conduct, social responsibility, and spiritual awareness.

This paper systematically examines the understanding of human well-being in IKS and evaluates its relevance to contemporary global challenges viz., life style

disorders, mental health disorders, chronic diseases, environmental crises, and social fragmentation.

Conceptual Framework of Well-Being in IKS

Definition of Health in Ayurveda

Ayurveda provides one of the earliest comprehensive definitions of Swastha:

“Samadosha samagnischa samadhatu malakriyah

Prasannatmendriya manah swastha ityabhidhiyate.”

This Sanskrit verse appearing in the Sushruta Samhita, 15/48 states that “One who is established in the self, whose Doshas are in balance, whose digestive fire (Agni) is in balance, whose body tissues (Dhatus) and bodily waste products (Malas) are functioning normally, and whose spirit, senses, and mind are full of bliss, is called a healthy person”

This definition integrates:

Physiological equilibrium

Psychological harmony

Emotional balance

Spiritual well-being

The World Health Organization’s concept of holistic health merely coincides with this definition.

Philosophical Foundations of Human Well-Being in IKS

- Purusharthas: The Fourfold Goals of Life

The four Purusharthas provide a structured approach to balanced living:

Dharma – Ethical and moral responsibility

Artha – Economic stability and livelihood

Kama – Emotional and aesthetic fulfillment

Moksha – Spiritual liberation

The balanced pursuit of these goals ensures integrated personal and societal well-being. Overemphasis on material gains without ethical grounding disrupts harmony.

- Panchakosha Model of Human Existence

The Taittiriya Upanishad describes five layers of human existence:

Annamaya Kosha – Physical body

Pranamaya Kosha – Vital energy system

Manomaya Kosha – Mental-emotional layer

Vijnanamaya Kosha – Intellectual faculty

Anandamaya Kosha – Bliss-consciousness

This layered model anticipates modern biopsychosocial frameworks and suggests that interventions must address at multiple levels of human existence .

Physical Well-Being: Ayurvedic Perspective

- Tridosha Theory

Ayurveda classifies physiological functions into three regulatory principles:

Vata (movement)

Pitta (transformation)

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Kapha (structure and stability)

Dosha	Primary Elements	Functions	Imbalance Effects
Vata	Air & Space	movement, respiration	circulation, Anxiety, dryness, joint pain
Pitta	Fire & Water	digestion, temperature	metabolism, Inflammation, anger, acidity
Kapha	Earth & Water	structure, stability, immunity	Obesity, lethargy, congestion

Table1. Characteristics of Tridosha

Individual constitution (Prakriti) determines susceptibility to diseases and personalized treatment strategies. Modern research correlates Prakriti types with genetic and metabolic patterns.

Preventive Healthcare Practices

Ayurveda emphasizes prevention through:

Dinacharya (daily routine)

Ritucharya (seasonal adaptation)

Balanced diet and digestion

Detoxification therapies (Panchakarma)

Lifestyle regulation is prioritized over reactive treatment, which is particularly relevant for combating lifestyle disorders such as diabetes and hypertension.

Mental and Emotional Well-Being: Yogic Psychology

- Eightfold Path of Yoga (Ashtanga Yoga)
Outline of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras:
- Yama (ethical restraints)
- Niyama (personal observances)
- Asana (posture)
- Pranayama (breathing regulation)
- Pratyahara (sensory withdrawal)
- Dharana (concentration)
- Dhyana (meditation)
- Samadhi (absorption)

This systematic progression addresses behavioral discipline, physiological balance, and cognitive restructuring.

Stress and Cognitive Regulation:

Modern neuroscience supports yoga and meditation:

Reduces cortisol levels

Improves neuroplasticity

Decreases anxiety and depression symptoms

Scientific studies indicate that Yogic practices:

Reduce stress hormones

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Improve emotional regulation

Enhance cognitive flexibility

Support cardiovascular health

Thus, IKS provides evidence-supported mental health strategies.

Social and Ethical Well-Being

IKS integrates collective welfare through concepts such as:

- Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (the world as one family)
- Ahimsa (non-violence)
- Seva (service)

Ethical behavior strengthens community trust and reduces social conflict, contributing to societal well-being.

Value-based education in traditional Gurukula systems integrated moral instruction with intellectual development.

Ecological Harmony and Environmental Well-Being

Indian traditions promote environmental sustainability through:

- Sacred groves
- River worship
- Seasonal agricultural cycles
- Non-exploitative consumption patterns

The ecological consciousness embedded in IKS aligns with modern sustainability models and climate action strategies.

Spiritual Dimension of Well-Being

Spiritual well-being such as meditation, self introspection, scriptural contemplation is considered the highest form of completeness.

Unlike materialistic practices, Spiritual resilience and inner peace strengthen the body and soul and leads to psychological stability.

Integration with Modern Science

- Integrative Medicine

Research institutions are exploring:

Ayurvedic herbal pharmacology

Mind-body medicine

Personalized healthcare models

Yoga is globally accepted as complementary therapy for all the physical and psychological disorders.

- Public Health Implications

IKS-based approaches can contribute to:

Preventive healthcare policy

Mental health programs

Sustainable lifestyle campaigns

India's AYUSH framework institutionalizes recognition of traditional knowledge systems with modern medicine.

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Aspect	IKS Approach	Modern Health Model
Health Definition	Holistic balance of body-mind-spirit	Absence of disease
Treatment Focus	Preventive & personalized	Curative & standardized
Mental Health	Meditation & ethical living	Psychotherapy & medication
Lifestyle	Daily & seasonal regulation	General guidelines
Ecology	Harmony with nature	Limited integration

Table 2: Comparison Between IKS and Modern Health Models

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

IKS contributes to:

SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being

SDG 4: Quality Education

SDG 12: Responsible Consumption

SDG 13: Climate Action

Thus, IKS offers a culturally rooted yet globally applicable sustainability model.

Challenges in Implementation

Standardization and quality control

Clinical validation of formulations

Misinterpretation or commercialization

Need for interdisciplinary research

Bridging epistemological differences between traditional and modern systems

Interdisciplinary collaboration is essential for responsible integration. Balanced integration requires scientific rigor and respect for traditional epistemology.

Future Directions

Genomic studies correlating Prakriti with biomarkers

Clinical trials for Ayurvedic interventions

Integration into education curricula

Global collaboration for holistic healthcare models

Conclusion

The Indian Knowledge System provides a holistic multidimensional and scientifically insightful model of human well-being integrating physical vitality, mental clarity, ethical living, social harmony, ecological awareness, and spiritual growth. In an era marked by mental disorders, chronic illnesses, and environmental crises, IKS offers preventive, personalized, and value-based solutions for comprehensive well-being. Future interdisciplinary research can further bridge traditional wisdom with modern scientific methodologies, enriching global health and sustainable development strategies.

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