

Panchakosha Vikas: Nurturing Holistic Development in Early Childhood Education

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Abstract

The primary objective of education is to provide a comprehensive platform for the holistic development of a child. The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) places a distinct focus on early childhood education, considering it as a vital stage of development for the child. In alignment with NEP 2020, the National Curriculum Framework for the Foundational Stage 2022 (NCF-FS 2022) accentuates the significance of incorporating the rich traditions of our country to attain optimal outcomes in different developmental domains. One notable concept from the Upanishads integrated into the curriculum framework is the 'Panchakosha Vikas'. This paper delves into the concept of 'Panchakosha' and the developmental framework for children through Panchakosha Vikas, aligning with the guidelines set forth in the NCF-FS 2022. By applying the principles of Panchakosha Vikas, educators can facilitate holistic development in early childhood. The incorporation of ancient Indian knowledge systems, theories and practices serves as a foundation for nurturing the holistic growth of children in the educational landscape outlined by the NEP 2020.

INTRODUCTION

The overarching purpose of human life is the pursuit of perfection, and education serves as a crucial tool in achieving this objective. The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) places a strong emphasis on fostering

the development of children through a blend of traditional and modern approaches. It prioritises children's enrichment, ensuring that they are well-equipped for holistic development. As articulated in the National Curriculum Framework for the Foundational

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Stage 2022, the Indian vision of education extends beyond surface-level learning, emphasising the need for education to facilitate both inner and external development. The NCF asserts, “Learning about the external world should be in consonance with learning about one’s inner reality and self.” The interdependence of inner and outer development is highlighted, emphasising that true holistic development encompasses both facets. A well-rounded individual, cultivated through holistic development, is better positioned to contribute to both individual and collective societal advancement.

The NEP 2020 introduces a novel pedagogical and curricular structure known as the ‘5+3+3+4’ system. Under this system, children commence formal education at the age of three years, fostering overall well-being from early childhood. Early childhood, defined as the formative stage spanning the first six years of life, is characterised by distinct sub-stages with age-specific needs, aligning with a life cycle approach. Research underscores the critical importance of this period, as it significantly influences the trajectories of physical and mental health, as well as behaviour, throughout an individual’s life. Consequently, the NEP 2020 underscores the significance of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), aiming for optimal outcomes in motor development, cognitive development, socio-emotional-ethical development, cultural or

artistic development, and language and communication development, including literacy and numeracy, during the early stages.

The recently released NCF-FS 2022 further refines this approach, centering on the *Panchakosha Vikas* concept derived from the *Upanishads*. This curriculum framework is aligned with the educational structure of the NEP 2020 and aims to enhance early childhood care and education at the foundational stage. In this paper, the researchers delve into the concept of *Panchakosha*— its utility for child development across various domains, drawing from a robust foundation in Indian tradition and *Upanishadic* wisdom.

CONCEPT OF PANCHAKOSHA IN THE UPANISHADS

The term ‘*Panchakosha*’ translates to ‘five sheaths’ in Sanskrit. In Sanskrit etymology, the term ‘*kosha*’ derives from the root verb ‘*kush*’, signifying ‘something which covers’. The *Upanishadic* literature elucidates that living beings possess not only a tangible physical body but also an astral body and a causal body. Analogous to the physical body’s covering—the skin—these additional bodies are enveloped by sheaths. The *Brahmananda Valli* of the *Taittiriya Upanishad* expounds upon the concept of these sheaths, outlining five distinct layers—*Annamaya Kosha*, *Pranamaya Kosha*, *Manomaya Kosha*, *Vijnanamaya Kosha* and *Anandamaya Kosha*.

The *Aitareya Upanishad* posits that the Supreme Soul (*Paramatma*) existed alone and desired to manifest in myriad forms. Furthermore, the *Taittiriya Upanishad* delineates the sequential emanation of elements, stating that from the *Paramatma* emerged *Akasha* (space), followed by air (*vayu*), fire (*agni*), water (*jal*) and ultimately, earth (*prithvi*). The earth, in turn, gave rise to medicinal substances, culminating in the production of ‘*anna*’ or food. It is from this edible sustenance that the human body originates. Consequently, this discernible corporeal entity is referred to as *Annamaya Kosha*. Beyond the tangible *Annamaya Kosha* lies the *Pranamaya Kosha*, characterised by the subtlety of vital air or breath. Progressing in subtlety, the *Manomaya Kosha* pertains to the mind. Subsequently, the *Vijnanamaya Kosha*, denoting the sheath of intellect, and the *Anandamaya Kosha*, signifying the sheath of bliss, are even more refined in their nature.

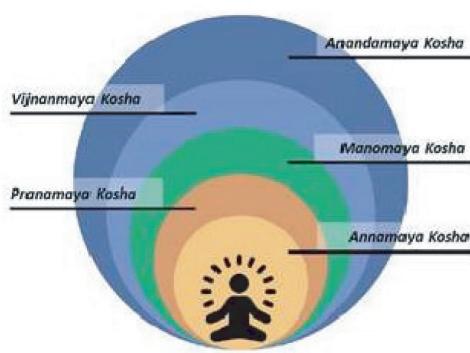


Figure 1: Panchakosha
Source: NCF-FS 2022

Thus, the concept of *Panchakosha* delineates the layered existence of living beings, encompassing the physical, vital, mental, intellectual and blissful dimensions. This profound understanding of the multi-layered nature of the self is elucidated through the teachings of the *Taittiriya* and *Aitareya Upanishads*.

As delineated earlier, living beings are endowed with three distinct bodies—the *Sthula Sharira*, or gross body, which is composed of physical matter encompassing the *Annamaya Kosha* and *Pranamaya Kosha*; the *Sukshma Sharira*, or subtle body, comprising the *Manomaya Kosha* and *Vijnanamaya Kosha*; and the *Karana Sharira*, or causal body, embodying the *Anandamaya Kosha*. The *Annamaya Kosha* is constituted by the fusion of the *Panchamahabhuta*—earth, water, fire, air and space—and the *Panchatanmatras*—sound, touch, form, taste and smell. The *Pranamaya Kosha* is formed by the amalgamation of the *Pancha Prana*—*Prana*, *Apana*, *Udana*, *Saman* and *Vyana*. Moving to the *Manomaya Kosha*, it encompasses the *Pancha Karmendriya*—speech, arms, legs, genital and excretory organs—and inner instruments, including the mind, memory and ego. The *Vijnanamaya Kosha* comprises the *Pancha Jnanendriya*—ears, skin, eyes, tongue and nose—along with the faculty of *buddhi*. Lastly, the *Anandamaya Kosha* is characterised by latent impressions.

Table 1
Structure of the Five Sheaths as Described in *Brahmananda-Valli of Taittiriya Upanishad*

	Annamaya Kosha	Pranamaya Kosha	Manomaya Kosha	Vijnanamaya Kosha	Anandamaya Kosha
Shira	Physical head	<i>Prana</i>	<i>Yajuh</i>	<i>Shraddha</i>	<i>Priya</i>
Dakshina Paksha	Right side of the body	<i>Vyana</i>	<i>Rik</i>	<i>Ritam</i>	<i>Moda</i>
Uttara Paksha	Left side of the body	<i>Apana</i>	<i>Sama</i>	<i>Satyam</i>	<i>Pramoda</i>
Atma	Middle part of body	<i>Akasha</i>	<i>Adesha</i>	<i>Yoga</i>	<i>Ananda</i>
Adhar	Feet	<i>Prithvi</i>	<i>Atharva</i>	<i>Maha</i>	<i>Brahma</i>

In the *Upanishads*, these *koshas* are metaphorically likened to a bird's body. The *Taittiriya Upanishad* intricately describes the structure of these sheaths, drawing parallels between the components of the *koshas* and the anatomy of a bird. This comparison serves to illustrate the interconnected and layered nature of these sheaths, shedding light on the intricate composition of human existence as expounded in the *Upanishadic* teachings as given in the table above.

Domains of Development

There are five domains of development of the child. These are:

1. Physical and motor development;
2. Social and emotional development;
3. Language development and early literacy;

4. Creative and aesthetic appreciation; and
5. Cognitive development.

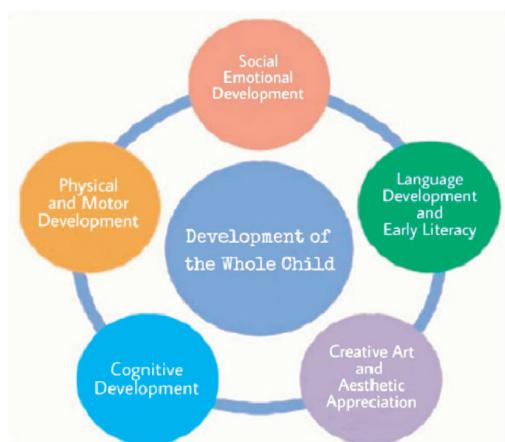


Figure 2: Domains of Development
Source: <https://itpd.ncert.gov.in>

Through every stage of life, these developments unfold concurrently in different domains.

The development of various domains is imperative, as it equips the child with the competence to achieve both individual and social goals. A healthy physical body is essential for optimal performance in any field, emphasising the significance of physical and motor development. The child's existence within society necessitates attention to social, emotional and ethical development. Additionally, cognitive development facilitates the child's ability to think critically and analyse concepts and phenomena. Nurturing a child's creativity and aesthetic domains is equally important.

Eastern and Western philosophical thought converges in support of *Panchakosha Vikas*, establishing a foundation for the importance of human development and progress (Satpathy, 2018). The *Panchakosha* Theory, rooted in ancient traditions, provides a holistic explanation of the interplay of the body, mind and soul in human experience (Jakhar, 2019).

Various philosophers and thinkers offer profound insights aligning with the stages of *Panchakosha Vikas* (Chabe & Chabe, 2020). Swami Sivananda's emphasis on yoga and physical exercises mirrors the initial layers of *Annamaya* and *Pranamaya Koshas*, laying the groundwork for spiritual growth (Strauss, 2002). Iyengar's focus on physical postures

aligns with the transformative process of shedding physical limitations and attaining alignment, flexibility and strength (Iyengar, 1991). Rousseau's advocacy for natural child development resonates with the progression through these layers, promoting physical health and self-reliance (Bloch, 1995; Fennell, 1979; Rousseau, 1762).

In the realm of social-emotional development, Ramakrishna's path of selfless love corresponds to the refinement of emotions and empathy as one ascends through the layers (Ramakrishna, 2008). Jiddu Krishnamurti's emphasis on self-awareness echoes the journey of exploring and understanding the *Manomaya Kosha*, the mental sheath (Pandey, 2023; Krishnamurti, 1955). Locke's (1963) nurturing of moral and emotional growth parallels the cultivation of virtues on this journey. Kohlberg's (1969) stages align with the evolving ethical consciousness as individuals progress towards self-realisation, while Freud's (1920) psychoanalytic insights illuminate the complexities of the inner layers of the human psyche. Erikson's (1959) psychosocial theory mirrors the various socio-emotional crises that shape personality and identity, akin to the challenges encountered along the path.

Tagore's (1916) nurturing of curiosity finds resonance in the intellectual growth fostered by the *Vijnanamaya Kosha*, while Aurobindo's (2005) integral approach

aligns with the holistic development encompassed by all sheaths. Montessori's hands-on learning aligns with the experiential aspect of cognitive growth (Kramer, 1976; Montessori, 1912).

Chomsky's Universal Grammar theory resonates with the innate cognitive structures that enable language acquisition. Skinner's (1938) Behaviourist perspective reflects the interplay of environmental influences and conditioning (Mangal, 2011; Panda, 2009). Bharata's *Natya Shastra* (2005) echoes the creative and aesthetic appreciation that unfolds as one progresses through the layers. Coomaraswamy's (2013) exploration of the deeper meanings of art aligns with the inner journey of aesthetic understanding. Dewey's integration of arts into education mirrors the holistic development of cognitive and creative aspects (Dewey, 1916).

Adi Sankaracharya's (1991) emphasis on self-inquiry corresponds to the reflective process, as one transcends the layers to realise the true self. Vivekananda's (1893) stress on critical thinking aligns with the discernment and wisdom cultivated on the journey. Piaget's (1952) cognitive stages parallel with the evolving cognitive abilities of the child and the complexity encountered on the path of development. Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory underscores the importance of social interactions, akin to the growth of community awareness experienced along the path.

These philosophers' insights collectively enrich the understanding of human development as a progression through the layers of *Panchakosha Vikas*, unveiling the profound journey towards self-realisation. These philosophical and psychological approaches to human development provide clear pathways and direction towards a more holistic education. Therefore, these foundations are integral for implementation in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) to facilitate the holistic development of the child. The National Curriculum Framework for the Foundational Stage (NCF-FS) 2022 emphasises that the concept of *Panchakosha* aligns with the different domains of development in ECCE, forming the basis of the curricular goals outlined in the framework (National Steering Committee for National Curriculum Frameworks, 2022). The mapping of *koshas* with the domains and nature of development is given in Table 2.

To ensure comprehensive nourishment across various domains in a child starting at an early age, it is imperative to acquaint them with the significance of the terms: *anna*, *prana*, *mana*, *vijnana* and *ananda*. Being habituated to a healthy lifestyle from an early age, a child is less likely to succumb to detrimental habits in both dietary choices and behaviour later in life. *Chandogya Upanishad* imparts the wisdom that "as is your food, so is your mind", underscoring the intimate connection between

Table 2
Mapping the Koshas with the Domains and Nature of Development

Kosha	Domain	Nature of Development
Annamaya	Physical	Ensuring that as you grow older, your body develops well in a balanced way, stays fit, flexible and strong, improving your senses; paying attention to what you eat and drink, staying clean and taking care of your health; expanding what your body can do and forming good habits to lead a healthy life for a hundred years.
Pranamaya	Physical	Keeping your energy balanced and preserved, staying positive and enthusiastic, and making sure all your important body systems work smoothly (like digestion, breathing, blood circulation and nerves), knowing when to activate the 'get up and go' and 'rest and relax' parts of your nervous system.
Manomaya	Socio-emotional and Ethical	Focusing, staying calm, having determination and strength, being brave, managing 'difficult' feelings, adopting good qualities, knowing when to get involved, and when to step back from tasks, people and situations, finding joy, exploring the arts, understanding different cultures, and enjoying oral and written narratives.
Vijnanamaya	Cognitive	Watching closely, trying things out, thinking carefully, coming up with different ideas, putting things together, figuring things out step by step, being good with words, daydreaming, being creative, telling things apart, finding common patterns and grasping ideas.
Anandamaya	Aesthetic and Cultural	Feeling joyful, being caring and kind, being natural, having freedom, enjoying beauty and exploring the journey of looking within yourself.

dietary habits and mental well-being. The well-being of the *Manomaya Kosha* is intricately linked to the health of both *Annamaya Kosha* and *Pranamaya Kosha*.

The *Bhagavad Gita* further elucidates the interdependence of mind, thoughts, and actions,

emphasising the profound influence of the mind on dietary habits (*Bhagavad Gita*, 2021). Thus, a harmonious relationship exists between the *Manomaya Kosha*, *Annamaya Kosha* and *Pranamaya Kosha*. When these three sheaths are nurtured effectively, the *Vijnanamaya Kosha*

can function properly, fostering the development of the cognitive domain. With the nourishment of these four sheaths, the *Anandamaya Kosha* leads individuals to inner awareness, aligning with the ultimate goal of education in the Indian perspective. A strong foundation based on these concepts ensures that the child embarks on the path of holistic development.

CONCLUSION

The Indian knowledge system stands out as a distinctive, scientific and perennially relevant repository of wisdom. While in the post-Independence era, Vedic science did not receive the emphasis it rightfully deserved, the tide is now turning. Modern scientists and educationalists are increasingly

recognising and accepting the enduring relevance of Vedic science. The National Education Policy 2020 underscores the importance of integrating Indian traditional practices with contemporary developments. However, the ultimate objective remains the holistic development of every individual, encompassing the harmonious growth of the body, mind and soul.

The *Upanishads*—repositories of knowledge passed down through the *guru-shishya parampara* from one generation to the next—hold invaluable insights into every aspect of human life. The National Curriculum Framework for the Foundational Stage 2022 (NCF-FS) has commendably embraced the concept of *Panchakosha Vikas*, recognising its significance in fostering a child's development during the early stages of life.

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