

Concept of *Panchakosha* in *Vedic Literature*

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Abstract

Concept of *Panchakosha* originated from *Taittiriya Upanishad*, describes the concept of five sheaths of existence called '*Panchakosha*'. *Koshas*, usually referred to as sheath, is a covering of the Atman, or Self, according to *Vedantic* philosophy. In *Yogadi* scriptures, there is description of two types of human beings named *Bhavapratyaya* and *Upayapratyaya*. Almost all our solutions are in the category of *Pratyaya*. For those with the *Upayapratyaya*, *Siddhi* is attained through "*Janmaushadhi mantra tapah Samadhijah Siddhayah*" etc. First of all, by purifying the five cells with the help of *Aushadhi* (medicines etc.), *siddhis* are achieved gradually. Hence, the knowledge-science, action-effects of these five sheaths (*Annamaya Kosha*, *Pranamayakosha*, *Manomaya Kosha*, *Vigyanamaya Kosha*, *Anandamaya Kosha*). By knowing the power-relationships etc. and purifying them, a person can transform from a human being to a God, from a God to a sage, and progress his spiritual, spiritual, spiritual and attain eternal happiness, peace, joy and salvation.

This article explains about the concept of *Panchkosha*, it says that starting from *Annamaya Kosha* and reaching upto the *Anandamaya Kosha*, our existence has five sheaths called as *Panchkosha*. When the identification with the *Panchkosha* i.e. sheaths ceases, the self realises the infinite being and gets liberated beyond death. Hence, an individual needs proper balance of all the five *Koshas* to be in a state of complete health.

Keywords: *Panchakosha*, sheath, *Annamaya*, *Pranamaya*, *Manomaya*, *Vijnanamaya*, *Anandamaya*

Introduction

Panchkosha is a Sanskrit term meaning 'Five' and *Kosha* meaning 'sheath'. *Panchkosha* refers to concept in *Yoga* philosophy that are five layers of awareness to help discriminate between self and not self. According to *Upnishads*, human nature or *Prakriti* comprises of five different dimensions. Each of five separate energy sheaths, or *Koshas*, which surrounds *Jivatman*, makes up an individual human. Since these layers encompass all aspects of existence, from gross to transcendental dimensions, each *Kosha* vibrates at a different pace, and they interact

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and overlap with one another. *Panchkosha* also states that physical and psychological components of human nature are integrated into a single, holistic system.

Mandukya Upnishad considers the *Sharira* as three parts namely physical part (*Sthula Sharira*), a subtle or inner part (*Sukshma Shaira*) and the Causal body (*Karan Sharira*)¹.

Sthula Sharira includes the physical body and its parts. The *Sukshma Shaira* includes emotional, rational thinking. The *Karan Sharira* includes the complete health and happiness. A balance between these three *Shariras* is believed to be necessary for complete health.

According to *Vedanta* Philosophy, there are three frames or types of body (*Sharira*) enveloping the soul. It consist of five inter penetrating sheath.

Three *Shariras* are depicted as

- ❖ *Sthula Sharira*, the gross frame / anatomical sheath.
- ❖ *Sukshma Shaira*, the subtle frame, consisting of physiological, Psychological and intellectual Sheath.
- ❖ *Karan Sharira*, so called causal frame - Spiritual sheath².

In Indian thought, one version of the great nest of being is found in *Taittreya Upnishad* (Swami Gambhirananda, 1958; Swami Shivananda, 1983; Swami and Yeats, 1988/1937), which includes theory of *Panchkosha* “Cosmic Hierarchy” (Goertzel, 2006, Page no.30) based on five bodies (*Kosha* or sheaths) of consciousness and considered “to be a most useful springboard for a modern scientific understanding of cosmology and evolution” (Goswami, 2000, Page no.114).

Concept of *Panchakosha* originated from *Taittireya Upanishad*, a Vedic era Sanskrit Text embedded within *Yajurveda*. It describes five stratum of the consciousness in the world³.

- *Annamaya Kosha* : Gross physical appearance / Physical Sheath
- *Pranamaya Kosha* : Vital life force / Vital Sheath i.e. Breath
- *Manomaya Kosha* : Mental and emotional status / Mental Sheath
- *Vigyanmaya Kosha* : Subtle knowledge / Wisdom Sheath
- *Anandmaya Kosha* : State of eternal freedom / Bliss body

Annamaya Kosha

Annamaya Kosha is the physical body / Physical Sheath that composes the outermost layer or this is the gross or body of the individual. Which is sustained and nourished by our food when we eat food the same turn into the muscles, veins, blood cells, and bones. If an individual takes balanced diet and does proper exercise, the *Annamaya Kosha* grows well, and the individual becomes fit and enjoys health.

***Pranamaya Kosha*:**

The next layer, internal to Physical Sheath is *Pranamaya Kosha* or Vital

Sheath i.e. Breath. In Indian Philosophy *Prana* is the vital life force which flows throughout our physical systems. The breath is the most physical expression of *Prana*, and *Prana* is closely related to the breath. *Prana* is the vital life strength that permeates our body. *Prana* literally means 'life force'. It is the force that we need for living activities like breathing, talking, moving, digesting etc. in human body, *Prana* is the underlying intelligence that coordinates harmonious functioning of the different component '*Pranas*' - breathing, circulation, nervous systems, digestive and inner organs like the liver and the glands that endows the body with life. Without *Prana*, the body is dead and not alive. This universal vital force is expressed in different ways, and takes on different functions in the body. In *Ayurvedic* Literature it is advised that one has to protect *Prana* as it ultimately leads to longevity and quality of life.

Pranamaya Kosha is made up of five major *Pranas* which are collectively known as *Pancha Pranas* i.e. *Prana Vayu*, *Udana Vayu*, *Samana Vayu*, *Apana Vayu* and *Vyana Vayu*.

- ❖ *Prana Vayu* is situated in heart and its energy pervades the chest region.
- ❖ *Udana Vayu* is traced in throat and it has a circular flow around the head and neck region.
- ❖ *Samana Vayu* is situated in abdomen with its energy centered in Umbilical region.
- ❖ *Vyana Vayu* is situated in heart and lungs and flows throughout the entire body.
- ❖ *Apana Vayu* is located in pelvic region and its energy pervades the lower abdomen.

These are *Pancha Pranas* which are described in *Ayurveda*, represents the fundamental Sheath⁴.

Manomaya Kosha

Third layer is *Manomaya Kosha* i.e. Mental Sheath. *Manas* means mind, it is the source of everything. *Manomaya Kosha* is the layer of mind which comprises of thoughts, emotions, feelings and passions. Our mind can reach any place in less than a second. Thus, it is difficult to control thoughts. It affect the functions of awareness, feelings, emotions and sentiments and motivations not derived from subjective experience. *Yoga* deals with the control of thoughts waves of the mind. "*Yogah Chittavritti Nirodhah*" means, *Yoga* controls the fluctuations of the mind (Patanjali Yoga Sutra 1.2).

According to Swami Vivekananda, the mind apparatus *Chitta* is a combination of three components namely *Manas*, *Buddhi* and *Ahamkara* and sensory organs (*Indriyas*), (Vivekananda, 1976, pg.no.116).

Manas is the desiring or pleasure seeking part. *Chitta* is the subconscious part, storing past experiences. *Buddhi* is the intellectual part, that is connected to the

consciousness providing knowledge of good and bad, intuition and wisdom. *Ahamkara* is the false mind or ego, which is an embodiment of pride, anger, hatred, greed, jealousy and fear. These negative emotions project negative energies and destroy the inner balance^{5,6}.

The *Manomaya Kosha* unit of *Bhavana* (emotion) is where fast thought recycling takes place. It is recognized by ego supported the development of emotions like likes, dislikes, jealousy, love, hate, possessiveness, guilt, pride, etc. When these feelings become strong, they take control of our behavior and act against the morality of cosmic laws, creating imbalances known as *Adhi* (stress). Prolonged *Adhi* interferes with the proper operation of the *Annamaya*, *Pranamaya*, and *Manomaya Koshas*, leading to *Vyadhi* (diseases). For this in *Ayurveda Satvavjaya Chikitsa* and *Bhootvidya* is recommended⁷.

Vigyanmaya Kosha

Vigyan means Subtle knowledge, hence this layer represent wisdom Sheath or intellectual component of judgment and reasoning. In *Vigyanmaya Kosha* is the storehouse of all the information, intellect describes and identifies the ability of human mind to reach any decision with its own *Buddhi* and *Viveka*. Hence, it is important to apply both simultaneously while reaching to any conclusion⁸.

Anandmaya Kosha

In Sanskrit literature *Anand* means bliss and *Kosha* means sheath. Hence, *Anandmaya Kosha* is the pure bliss not relating to emotions like happiness or pleasure, but an infinite experience of reality or we can say happiness peaceful sheath. It is said to be the most spiritual, or subtle, of the five layers of the body as it is the innermost layer. *Taittiriya Upanishad's Ananda Mimamsa* (happiness analysis) explains about the most elementary issues of living organisms. It systematically directs towards the *Anandamaya Kosha* from which *Prana* and mind emerge. It is the most subtle aspect of our existence which is devoid of any form of emotions, a state of total silence, a state of complete harmony and perfect health (Nagarathna & Nagendra, 2008)⁹.

Five Koshas in Yogic tradition

Yoga is an ancient Indian science and art catering to the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of an individual and by consequence, society at large. The real goal of *Yoga* is to establish a relationship with the individual soul, also known as *Jivatman*, which is a part of each of us at our core. The word '*Yoga*' in *Sanskrit* refers to 'union', i.e. union of *Atman* (Self, i.e. the person) with *Brahman*. Mention of *Yoga* occurs in the *Upanishads*, *Puranas*, *Bhagavad Gita* and several other ancient sources. *Yoga Sutra* defines the term *Yoga* as the process of making the mind tranquil and stationary, and also goes on to explain the real purpose of *Yoga* as reaching *Brahman* (Supreme Truth), i.e. attainment of *Moksha*. *Yoga* practices intended to act at physical, intellectual, emotional and even at spiritual level. This derived from

principles in ancient texts like *Patanjali Yoga Sutra* and *Taittreya Upnishad*¹⁰.

According to *Yogic* tradition, there are five sheaths of existence of man. The sheaths are called '*Kosha*' and five layers are called '*Panchakosha*'.

Principles of *Yogic* Management

Yogic management provides various techniques to bring back the balance of each *Koshas*. The techniques are as follows

1. *Annamaya Kosha-Asanas, Kriyas, Diet & relaxation*
2. *Pranamaya Kosha-Pranayama practices*
3. *Manomaya Kosha-Meditation and devotional sessions*
4. *Vigyanamaya Kosha-Notional correction through counseling.*
5. *Anandamaya Kosha-Practice of living happily in all circumstances and work in relaxed mind. An individual needs proper balance of all the five Koshas to be in a state of complete health. Thus, Yogic techniques, can bring health, harmony and peace to the suffering humanity*¹¹.

Conclusion

Psychological well being with a blissful state of mind, soul and sense organs is an essential component of health. (*Sushruta Sutra Sthana 15/41*)¹². In the eye's of Ayurveda, human body is a container of true self or pure consciousness which has its seat in the centre of this container. Surrounding the eternal self is a layer of sheaths, traditionally called *Koshas*, which organize the various elements of human being. These sheaths get progressively more dense as they move outward. This article explains about the concept of *Panchkosha*, it says that starting from *Annamaya Kosha* and reaching upto the *Anandamaya Kosha*, our existence has five sheaths called as *Panchakosha*. By purifying the five cells with the help of *Aushadhi* (medicines etc.), *Siddhis* are achieved gradually. Hence, the knowledge-science, action-effects of these five sheaths (*Annamaya Kosha, Pranamaya Kosha, Manomaya Kosha, Vijnanamaya Kosha, Anandamaya Kosha*).

'*Annamaya*'; a segment of human system is nourished by '*Anna*', i.e., food. '*Pranamaya*' is that segment which is nourished by '*Prana*', i.e. 'Vital energy'. '*Manomaya*' is the segment nourished by 'thoughts'. '*Vignanamaya*' is nourished by 'intellect' and '*Anandamaya*' is the segment nourished by 'bliss'.

Purification, refinement and development of *Annamaya Kosha* is possible through *Upvas, Asanas, Tatvashudhi* i.e. inner purification and *Yoga* works most directly on the imbalances of body. In order for the body to function properly, *Prana* must be flowing freely. *Yoga, Pranayama* practice is the best way to correct *Pranamaya Kosha*. Our mind is located in a more dense sheath called *Manomaya Kosha*. *Yoga, Pranayam* and Meditation helps to balance this *Kosha*. *Vigyanmaya Kosha* is the sheath of discernment, like *Manomaya Kosha, Vigyanmaya Kosha* can be reached with regular practice of *Yoga, Pranayam* and meditation practices. *Anandmaya Kosha* is most subtle layer beyond any explanation. It is the core of our

being. It is spiritual. Once this *Kosha* is awakened we feel blissful. Meditation helps us to achieve the state of *Anand*. A combination of *Raja Yoga*, *Bhakti Yoga*, *Karma Yoga* and *Gyan Yoga* enhances our experience of Blissful self.

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