

Panch Kosha and their Development

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Abstract

The present paper deals with the ancient Indian five-fold model of human personality described as 'Panch Kosha' in Tattiriya Upanishada. Yogic philosophy believes that there are five cardinal layers that surround the human soul. The Atman is at the centre of the koshas. These five layers are also considered the five sheaths of human's personality. These are five different layers of our human growth and evolution. Every human being is endowed with certain physical and psychological features that work together in a holistic manner.

The panch koshas are 'Annamaya' (food sheath), 'Pranamaya' (vital air sheath), 'Manomaya' (mental sheath), 'Vijnanamaya' (intellectual sheath), and 'Anandamaya' (bliss sheath). 'Annamaya'; a segment of human system is nourished by 'anna', that is, food. 'Pranamaya' is that segment which is nourished by 'prana', that is, 'bioenergy'. 'Manomaya' is the segment nourished by 'education'. 'Vijnanamaya' is nourished by 'ego' and 'Anandamaya' is the segment nourished by bliss. All these koshas are considered to reside one under the other, annamaya being the outermost sheath and anandamaya the innermost. These sheaths are interdependent, they have their impact on the development and functioning of other sheaths.

Development of all the sheaths fully is necessary for a man's complete spiritual evolution and ultimate union with the Divine. Simple measures to develop these sheaths have been given in detail.

Introduction

PANCH KOSHA

The concept of Panch Koshas was given in the Brahmanandavalli chapter of the ancient Indian text Tattiriya Upanishada which is a part of Tattiriya Samhita of Krishna Yajur Veda. Panch Kosha is a Sanskrit term made up of two words- 'Pancha' and 'Kosha'. Panch means 'five' and Kosha means 'sheath' or 'layer'. The concept of Panch Kosha was also elucidated in many other sacred ancient Hindu texts like Vivekachudamani and Panchdasi. According to Yogic philosophy, there are five cardinal layers/ sheaths that surround the human soul. The Atman is at the centre of the koshas. These five layers are also considered the five sheaths of

human's personality. These are five different layers of our human growth and evolution. Yogic philosophy of panch kosha believes that every human being is endowed with certain physical and psychological features that work together in a holistic manner. According to the Kosha system in Yogic philosophy, the nature of being human encompasses physical and psychological aspects that function as one holistic system. The Kosha system refers to these different aspects as layers of subjective experience. Layers range from the dense physical body to the more subtle levels of emotions, mind and bliss. This **Pancha Koshas theory** is the Vedantic psycho- philosophical view of human beings.

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Figure 1. Five sheath of human personality (source: The kundaliniyoga.com)

1. Annamaya Kosha (The Food Sheath)

The outer part of our body is called Annamaya kosha. 'Annamaya' (Anna means food and Maya means 'made of') is a segment of the human system which is nourished by food . Here food represents the 'physical matter' from which the body formation took place (five great elements- earth, water, fire, space and air) and ultimately dissolves into the same (after death).The food makes human being to survive and after death it goes back to the earth, fertilizes the soil and become food again. The whole process is natural, where the ingredients of the physical structure start from food and go back to become food. Because of this, the first layer of the body is linked with the **mooladhar chakra** and **earth and water** element present in our body.

This sheath contains the great five elements that constitute the physical body with a dominance of 'Tamo guna (Tamas)'. It's perishable in nature and hence, has a beginning and an end (birth and death).

This sheath occurs from the principle of food adopted by the father and nurtured in the womb of the mother. This sheath is the result of the combination of *shukla* (male seed) and *Sonita* (female seed) and depends on food because semen is the byproduct of food synthesis only.

Constitution of the individual consisting of physical, mental, social and emotional traits depend on the condition of annamaya kosha, the formation of which continues in each birth or life one has.

This is the physical body which needs food and nourishment to thrive. It is said to be the most vulnerable of the koshas and manifests in deficiencies on the other layers.

Annamaya kosha relies on shat-bhava-vikara (6 changes) concept viz . Birth, Existence, Growth, Change, Decay, and Death.

2. Pranamaya Kosha (The Fundamental Sheath/ Vital Sheath)

Pranamaya kosha is a restrained sheath of intergalactic energy that surrounds the physical body. It has a sheath of outer space energy that enters and surrounds the outer part of human body. It creates our 'aura', the brightness emitted from us. It also exists within the physical body and is composed of life force energy, or prana. It flows in the circulatory, lymphatic and nervous systems.

'Pranamaya' (vital air sheath) segment is nourished by 'Prana'. Prana is one of the nourishments that are important for our life, just like food and drink. As we take breath, we not only take oxygen inside but also the prana. All food gives us nutrition as well as prana. The prana is also affected by other factors like our thoughts and emotions, and has an impact on other koshas. This sheath contains the **five pranas** that manifest in the physical body and connect it to the next kosha i.e. Manomaya kosha.

Panch pranas and their corresponding physiological systems are described in detail in Ayurveda. These are-

- a. Prana (Sense of Perception): It moves inward the body and controls the perception of the fivefold stimuli received from the external environment.
- b. Apana (Sense of Excretion): It has downward movement. All things thrown out of body or rejected by the body such as perspiration, urine, faeces, semen, menstrual fluids, fetus etc. are expressions of Apana.
- c. Samana (Sense of Digestion): It has an inward movement. This digests the food collected in the stomach and distributes the essence of the food to entire system.
- d. Vyana (Sense of Circulation): Vyana is the faculty, by power of which the nutrients resulting from the digested food are properly conveyed to the various limbs of the body through the bloodstream. Its movement is from center to periphery.
- e. Udana (Sense of Assessment/ Thinking): The capacity in an individual to raise his thoughts from their present level so as to conceive a possibility or approach or idea. It is closely related to the capacity of self-education. Udana has an upward movement.

It is responsible for growth of the body, the ability to stand, speak, effort, enthusiasm and will.

This sheath has a dominance of Rajo guna (Rajas), hence subtle activities are normal in this layer. This sheath is also perishable and has a beginning and an end. Prana is the life force that is present in the entire cosmos. It is derived from Moola Prakriti or the Divine Mother. This kosha corresponds to the elements of **fire** and **water**. **Manipura** and **swadhithan chakras** are the seat of pranamaya kosha.

3. Manomaya Kosha (The Mind Sheath)

‘Manomaya’ (mind sheath) is a mental body made by mind, thoughts and emotions and is nourished by knowledge. It is more wide and powerful than Pranamaya kosha. Its scope is unlimited as our mind can reach any place in a fraction of seconds. This kosha regulates Pranmaya kosha.

This sheath contains *gyanendriyas* and *karmendriyas* for interaction with the outer world. *Gyanendriyas* are sense organs through which one perceives objects of the world and *karmendriyas* are organs of actions through which one manipulates with the objects of the world. The mind along with the five senses and corresponding sensory organs - taste (tongue), smell (nose), vision (eyes), hearing (ear), and touch (skin)- is said to constitute the manomaya kosha or ‘mind-sheath’.

This kosha is made of a combination of Sattva guna and Tamo guna. It’s also perishable in nature and has a beginning and an end. The Manomaya Kosh comprises a mental faculty receiving all the sensory signals. Then interprets these signals as positive or negative aspects and at the end aspires to the positive desire.

The primary functions of manomaya kosha are *Sankalpas* and *Vikalpas*. *Sankalpas* are the aspects to interpret the intention and act accordingly and *Vikalpas* refer to rejecting undesirable actions mostly with negative outcome. Our mind is composed with certain traits referred to as Vrittis, such as lust, anger, greed, etc. Thoughts in mind continually fluctuate and hence are referred to as *Vikara* (changing traits). Atman has no scope for any change or modification, hence is referred to as *Nirvikara* (changeless). Manomaya kosha corresponds to the **air** and **space** elements and represents **anahata chakra**.

4. Vijnanamaya Kosha (The Rational Sheath/ Intellect Sheath)

‘Vijnanamaya’ (rational/intellect sheath) is nourished by ‘ego’. Vijnana literally means **intellect**, hence Vijnanamaya kosha is the intellect/wisdom/knowledge sheath. In the chakras system, this kosha is related to the **vishuddhi** and **Ajna chakra** and predominant with the **air** and **space** element.

Buddhi / intellect with the five organs of knowledge constitutes the Vijnanamaya Kosha or the knowledge-sheath and is also considered to be the part of one’s being that is responsible for will, discernment, and determination. This sheath is the rational component of our being. Our mind is the storage of our past experiences and knowledge which are the prime sources of decision making. The mind receives signals through the sense organs and sends messages to the organs of action. The stimuli received through the five senses are different from each other, but an integrated decision is made by our mind.

It's characterized basically with an involvement with the intelligence even in deep sleep phase, referred to as *Chidabhasa* .

Vijnanamaya kosha is characterized by being interactive and dependent upon the other sheaths for its existence.

5. Anandamaya Kosha

Ananda means blissful experience. This sheath is the body of peace. Related to the **space** element, it is superior to all other koshas and difficult to enter or conquer. It corresponds to **sahasrar chakra**. In Advaita Vedanta, anandamaya kosha is referred to as the innermost kosha having close proximity with the soul, hence feels the blissful experience coming out of the soul.

Anandamaya sheath marks the segment which is nourished by emotions and consciousness. This is the intuitive expansive sheath aligned with the causal body and is often thought of as the soul (atman).

The Anandamaya Kosha in its sattvic aspect is the cause of the blissful experience of *Sushupti* or deep sleep pattern. The anandamaya kosha highlights the three positive blissful qualities of the Soul viz. Sat, Chit and Anand.

- Sat refers to being truthful and eternal.
- Chit refers to the one which is alive and has consciousness, the main bridging line separating the living and the non-living.
- Anand refers to an ever-joyful state.

Anandmaya sheath refers to the most subtle body which is perceived in bliss.

INTERACTION OF KOSHAS

The five sheaths reside one under the other, annamaya being the outermost and annandmaya the innermost. But they are not independent. Every sheath has effects on its previous and next sheath. Their interactive relation is shown in figure 2.

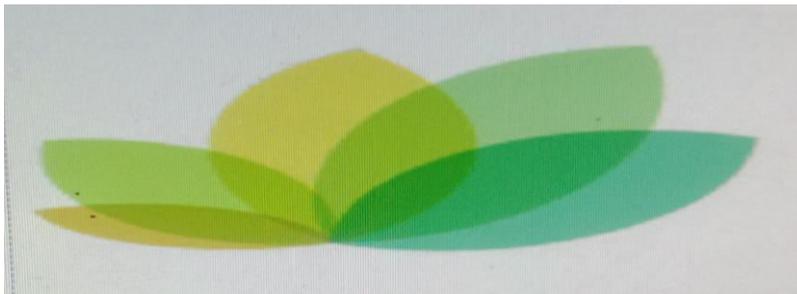


Figure 2. Interaction of five koshas (Source: Iyenger, 2017)

DEVELOPMENT OF KOSHAS

Ayurveda has constructs that are elemental and based in physiology as well as psychology, it provides a far more globally valid system of determining personality. This ancient Indian system is not only used for maintaining good health, it can also help us balance our personality 'flaws' and enhance our positive traits. By adjusting lifestyle, exercise, and diet – as based on analysis of the gunas and the particular doshas present – Ayurvedic wisdom can assist in modifying behavior and personality as described through panch koshas.

Maharishi Aurobindo emphasizes that panch koshas need to be developed in every child from a young age. They provide him with life-long foundation and success.

Indian spiritual course recognizes the deep reality that panch koshas of a human being possess the potential to develop and progress towards advanced levels of existence (Dalal and Mishra, 2010). It also explains the 'process of evolution of consciousness and thus the consequent growth and development of individual self' (Kiran, 2004).

Development of kosha refers to the overall personality development. This starts from anamaya kosha and moves towards the pure consciousness (real self/ atman) steadily unleashing the five sheaths that cover it. For reaching the higher level of consciousness one needs to develop these five sheaths. Development of all the sheaths fully is necessary for man's complete spiritual evolution and ultimate union with the Divine. To achieve this goal one needs to develop these five sheaths through a certain path-

Development of Annamaya Kosha

Since, this kosha is food sheath, developing it mainly relies upon food. When we eat food, it turns into the muscles, bones, veins, blood cells, etc. Balanced diet and proper exercise helps the annamaya kosha develop well and the individual remains fit and enjoys health. Annamaya kosha can be developed by correcting usual eating habits and performing physical exercises.

1. Taking balanced and sattvik food. Sattvik food endows nourishment to one's body and encompasses the synergy all around.
2. Doing physical exercises like walking, running, yogic asanas etc. In yoga, various asanas are helpful to nurture the body and hence the annamaya kosha.
3. Participating in physical fitness programs like games, sports, aerobics, karate etc. (Praveen,2015)

Along with above measures, following methods can also be adopted to purify and develop the annamaya kosha:

Upavas (fasting), Asanas (Yogic postures), Tatvashudhi (Inner Purification), Tapashcharya (Practice of austerity), and Letting our soul free from worldly attachments.

The first objective of spirituality is freeing the soul from the attachment and identification with the food sheath, which only can be realized when one is aware of the first sheath completely.

Development of Pranamaya Kosha

According to Ayurveda the health problem starts with the level of energy before moving to the level of physique. Pranamaya kosha is refined through the means of air and food we take. The lungs and intestine supply the essence of air and nutrition of food to pranamaya kosha. In this way pranamaya kosha is refined and consequently refines our body and mind.

The symbols of the development of pranamaya kosha are passion, enthusiasm, perseverance, good communication skills, flexibility of body, leadership skills, discipline, honesty and nobility.

The pranamaya kosha can be developed by-

1. Practicing pranayama or various other breathing exercises which promote the excellence of this kosha.
2. Practicing asanas with awareness of breath.

3. Spending more time with activities that keep our spirit high.
4. Spending more time with people who keep our spirit high.
5. Chanting mantras.
6. Practicing silence and meditation.

Development of Manomaya Kosha

Since it is mind sheath, consisting of knowledge, senses, actions, thoughts, emotions, vrittis, vikaras, it is very difficult to control it. Our thoughts are generally free flowing and control over them is very difficult. It is said that one who is able to control his mind, can gain control over his destiny.

Development of manomaya kosha results in sound mental health of humans.

The manomaya kosha can be developed by-

1. Thinking positive.
2. Storing good memories in our mind.
3. Various aspects of yogic practice positively affect this kosha. For example, meditation and alternate nostril breathing (Anuloma-viloma) can calm the mind.
4. Following Yama and Niyama, which are the ten ethical principles of Raj Yoga. These are: non-violence, discipline, purity of thoughts, giving, understanding, truthfulness, non-stealing, non-accumulating, studying Holy scriptures, and devotion to God.
5. Keeping our mind fresh through regular prayers.
6. Making resolutions and fulfilling them.
7. Developing a keen sense of appreciation of fine arts like dance, music and painting etc.

Development of Vijnanmaya Kosha

Vijnanmaya kosha is a layer which gives an opportunity of going beyond self and to be aware of co-workers, other members of community, country and even of the world and sees oneness in all the creatures of the world. Once the vijnanmaya kosha is nurtured, the special powers of the body start functioning. The signs of awakened vijnanmaya kosha are that the person becomes-

- more telepathic,
- powerful in reading others thoughts and influencing them,
- a healer whose words may heal or cure many problems and even diseases.

Vijnanmaya kosha is inherent in the body and is hidden within, so to experience it, we need to release it. Once released this kosha is refined by riding on the wings of detachment (vairagya) and wisdom (vivek). To further develop this kosha will power (Iksha Shakti), passion for work (kriya Shakti) and power of intellect (gyan shakti) are required to be released.

Vijnanmaya kosha can be developed by-

1. Taking sattvik food.
2. Living in a harmonious environment.
3. Keeping good intentions.
4. Practicing meditation.
5. Practicing yogic asanas.
6. Practicing mantra meditation.

7. Practicing awareness of one's self.
8. Performing activities related to intellect, like debates, analytical tasks, project making, reviewing books, interviewing renowned persons etc.

Development of Anandmaya Kosha

After developing all the above four koshas, one reaches to annandmaya kosha. The devotion and belief in God gives way to annandmaya kosha. Wisdom (the true knowledge) also helps gradually in developing this kosha.

To get it in a balanced state, pranayama and meditation practice every day for at least 20 minutes can help a lot.

Awakening of annandmaya kosh can be done by some practices-

1. Seva: It refers to selfless service. Empathy with other beings is necessary for it.
2. Bhakti: Bhakti is pure devotion to God. Practice of bhakti unites the heart of bhakt to all other divine beings.
3. Samadhi: It is the deep meditation which opens our heart to one's own divine being which resides within our soul.

When all the kosha are well developed, refined or awakened the true sense of harmony can be experienced between the intrinsic self and the extrinsic world. This harmony brings happiness, tranquility and a feel of bliss. Here the inner self realizes the presence of God (the infinite being) and is liberated from the cycle of birth and death.

As we all know God resides in each and everything of the world, but He resides in True self. The ultimate goal of spirituality is to liberate the soul from the worldly attachments (Maya) and unite oneself with the supreme, infinite. Since God resides in True self, union with Him needs to move beyond the annandmaya kosha, i.e. the state of bliss. Reaching annandmaya kosha is not possible without awakening of all other four koshas successively. Hence, development of all these koshas is necessary for achieving the ultimate goal of life, i.e. union of soul (Atma) with God (Parmatma).

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