

## THE PANCHA KOSHAS: KEYS TO UNVEIL OUR TRUE SELF

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### ABSTRACT

*Yoga*, an ancient cultural heritage of India, understands health and well-being as a dynamic continuum of human nature and not a mere 'state' to be attained and maintained. Understanding the principles of *Yoga* on the basis of quantum physics which is currently the highest form of science available to mankind will help us get a clear picture of what exactly the sages wanted us to understand in the process of healing. *Yoga* conceptualizes the human being as a multi layered, conscious being, possessing three bodies or *Sharira* (*Sthula*-gross, *Sukshma* -subtle and *Karana* -causal) and having a five layered existence (*Pancha Kosha*) consisting of our anatomical, physiological, psychological, intellectual and universal existential layers. *Yoga* as a way of conscious living enables the individual to attain and maintain a dynamic *sukha sthanam* that may be defined as a dynamic sense of physical, mental and spiritual well-being. Development of an integrated self and a sound personality requires awakening and balancing of all these five layers and treating the imbalances in the correct way by using different modalities of treatment mentioned in *Yoga* and *Ayurveda*. This is a conceptual review to understand and integrate different modalities of treatment on the basis of *pancha kosha* concept.

**Keywords:** *Pancha Kosha*, Quantum Physics, *Yoga*, *Ayurveda*.

### INTRODUCTION

Multilevel cosmological models have emerged from Indian tradition which provides structural frameworks to understand the relationship between consciousness and creativity.<sup>1</sup> In *yogic* philosophy there are various concepts which help us to understand the nature of the human being. One such conceptual system is that of the *Pancha kosha*.<sup>2</sup> As per quantum physics everything in the universe is interrelated and a change in one part of the system will be reflected in the other part as well. This quantum world view is entirely consistent with the *Vedic* concept of 'innate unity' and

mutual inter-relationship of everything in this universe. One of the earliest and greatest fundamental discoveries of *Ayurveda* was the law of uniformity of nature or *loka-purusha samanya*, this was based on the observations of the intimate relationship between the micro and macrocosms. The *Pancha Kosha* concept explains the various dimensions of human personality and helps us to explore the unknown regions of our own being.<sup>3</sup>

This article emphasizes the importance of understanding the multidimensional nature of human being and

the need for a multidimensional approach for the maintenance of health.

#### AIM AND OBJECTIVES:

- To understand the concept of *Pancha Kosha* and its role in the management of physical and psychological ailments.
- To understand the role of *Ayurveda* and *Yoga* in the management of physical and psychological ailments by incorporating the concept of *Pancha Kosha*.

#### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The concept of *Pancha Kosha* is described in *Taittareeya Upanishad*, where the human being is detailed through five levels of subtlety varying from the gross layer, *Annamaya Kosha*, to the subtlest layer *Anandamaya Kosha*.<sup>4</sup> *Pancha Kosha* is the five sheaths of man arranged from the surface level of our physical body to the depths of the unconscious mind. At every moment and in every situation *koshas* determine our thoughts, emotions, words and deeds.<sup>5</sup> As per *Vedanta* tradition these *Pancha Koshas* are said to be residing in *Trisareera* i.e., *Sthula sareera* or gross body which constitutes the *Annamaya Kosha* and part (physical manifestation) of *Pranamaya Kosha*; *Sookshma Sharira* or subtle body comprises the *Pranamaya Kosha*, *Manomaya Kosha* and *Vijnanamaya Kosha*; *Karana sharira* or causal body comprises the *Anandamaya Kosha*.<sup>6</sup>

- ***Annamaya Kosha*** is outermost of the *koshas*, named from the fact that it is nourished by food. It is the only directly perceivable component of our self and therefore we incorrectly identify ourselves with it. This sheath has the most dense and slow vibrational frequency. This *kosha* cannot exist without contact with the other *koshas*.<sup>7</sup>
- ***Pranamaya Kosha*** is the energy sheath and is concerned with network of vital energy which regulates the growth, shape and function of physical body together the decay of cells, tissues and organs. In western mysticism, it is known as the etheric body, lowest layer in the human energy field or aura.<sup>8</sup> This energy fields are also corresponds to Bio-plasmic energy of Kirlian.<sup>9</sup> As per *Yoga* tradition the energy in these *koshas* are con-

ducting through energy channels called *Nadis*. A Uniform harmonious flow of *Prana* to each and every cell of the *Annamaya Kosha* keeps them alive and healthy. *Pancha Prana* or *Panchavayu* is the five dimensions of this *Mughya Prana*, its flow resulting in activities of different areas of the body. When they are functioning harmoniously, they assure the health and vitality of the body and mind.<sup>10</sup>

- ***Manomaya Kosha*** is the sphere of mind, which is closely tied to the physical body. Patterns of thinking, attitudes, and beliefs are all aspects of our *Manomaya Kosha*. Fixed ways of thinking and rigid responses leads to most of our emotional responses which is expressed through the *Pranamaya* and *Annamaya Koshas*. When the emotions become powerful, they start governing our actions, this leads to imbalances called *Aadhi* or stress. Long standing *Aadhis* get pushed into *Pranamaya* and *Annamaya Kosha* causing *Vyadhis* or diseases.<sup>11</sup>
- ***Vijnanamaya Kosha*** is the sheath of intellect and intuitive knowledge. In western mysticism, the *Vijnanamaya Kosha* is known as the higher astral body. *Buddhi* (intellect) is the quality of discrimination which comes after knowledge, after the removal of ignorance. This ability is more in human race that differentiates man from animals. It is also the repository of transpersonal faculties such as telepathy, clairvoyance, thought reading and other so called psychic or paranormal phenomena.<sup>12</sup> This process is well explained in the 'Morphogenetic Field Theory' proposed by biochemist Rupert Sheldrake.<sup>13</sup>
- ***Anandhamaya kosha*** is the bliss layer of our existence, is the most subtle aspect of our existence which is devoid of any form of emotions. It is a state of complete silence and a state of complete harmony and perfect health. It is the highest stage of evolution in the manifested existence. It is the subtlest among five layers of existence. They are the resultant drive of the seed of residual potencies or impression of previous birth i.e. *Beeja Samskara*.<sup>14</sup>

The *Koshas* make up a spectrum of energies which comprise our whole being, our perceptions and our capacity to act in the world.<sup>15</sup> Starting from the *Annamaya Kosha* which is solid energy, all these *koshas* exist at different levels of energy at increasing subtlety and vibration frequency. The *koshas* comprise our personality and yet they reach out far beyond our personality. The five *koshas* are the five sheaths of human personality. Each sheath has its own characteristics. The theory of *Pancha Kosha* is a way of transformation or transcendence from lower self to higher self and change in personality. There are many ways to achieve this transformation like *Ashtangayoga* of *Patanjali*. Harmony of all these *koshas* leads to perfect health, otherwise illness.<sup>16</sup>

Concept of health and disease according to *Yoga* is framed on a holistic view of human existence i.e., *Pancha Kosha*. In *Yogavasista* by *Valmiki* explains briefly about the concept of health and disease.<sup>17</sup> *Yoga* considers the human being not just as the physical body, but as a multi folded universe. Concepts of *Pancha Kosha* and *Trisharira* help us to understand our multidimensional real nature where health and disease result from a dynamic interaction at all levels of existence. In our lives we tend to over identify with the grosser *koshas* neglecting the subtle aspects. *Yoga* reminds us that our physical body is constantly changing. Science tells us that all the molecules and substances of the body are replaced every seven years. So instead of working from *Sthula Sharira* in order to purify and re-establish the subtle or causal interconnections, one can work with the physical directly from the subtle body.<sup>18</sup>

## DISCUSSION

The *Yogic* concept of health and disease enables us to understand that the cause of physical disorders that stem from the seed in the mind and beyond. By paying careful attention to personal history, one can merely always trace origins of psychosomatic disease back to patterns of mental and emotional pressures. There are various practices at different *kosha* levels.<sup>19</sup> The lasting cure is only possible when the causal disturbance is completely remedied. *Ayurveda* describes the role

of *Yoga* in the management of *Manodosh*. All the three main modalities of treatment in *Ayurveda* i.e. *Daivavyapasraya chikitsa* (Divine therapy), *Yukthivyapasraya chikitsa* (Rational treatment), *Satvavajaya chikitsa* (Trance therapy or Psychotherapy)<sup>20</sup> can be incorporated into *Pancha Kosha* level management.

### Discussion on *Annamaya Kosha*

*Annamaya Kosha* is gross, physical body. It includes *Pancha Jnanedriya* (five organs of perception) and *Pancha Karmendriya* (five organs of action). This layer of the body can be rendered healthy by different means of treatment like *Aushadha* (drugs), *Ahara* (Food), *Upavasa* (Fasting), *Asanas* (physical postures), *Suddhi kriyas* (Six cleansing techniques), *Tatvashudhi* (Inner purification), *Tapas* (Practice of austerity), etc. explained in *Ayurveda*, *Yoga* and *Naturopathy*.

- *Suddhi kriyas* activate and revitalize the organs and tone up their functions.<sup>21</sup>
- *Yogasanas* revitalize the body. Bring a state of deep relaxation and mental calmness.<sup>21</sup>
- Diet is one of the most important therapies in *Ayurveda*. Pure diet provides three levels of nutrition i.e., physical, mental and spiritual level of nourishment.<sup>22</sup> The five elements (*Panchamahabhutha*), sensory and mental impressions, *Triguna* (*Satwa*, *Rajas*, *Tamas*) all are dependent on *Ahara* we consume.<sup>23</sup>
- Herbs carry healing energies to keep human system in balance. Special herbs can help in detoxifying the body. Herbs affect the mind more directly than food. Herbs work as nutritive and cleansing agents.<sup>24</sup>
- *Abhyanga* (Massage) is an important *Ayurvedic* therapy not only for physical but also for psychological conditions.<sup>25</sup>
- *Pancha karma* (*Vamana*, *Virechana*, *Vasthi*, *Nasya* and *Rakthamokshana*), the five main treatment modalities of *Ayurveda* for physical purification. Owing to the subtle nature of its processes, it penetrates deep in to the nervous system, so it can also be helpful for psychological benefits.<sup>26</sup>

### Discussion on *Pranamaya kosha*

*Pranamaya Kosha* is the energy sheath. It corresponds to the physiology of the human system. Through the practice of proper breathing, *Suddhi kriyas* and *Pranayama* we can correct the imbalances of *Pranamaya Kosha*.<sup>27</sup>

- *Pranayama* corrects the functional imbalance like haphazard breathing, hypertension, palpitation, tremor, hypersensitive reaction, over activity and auto immune reaction.<sup>28</sup>
- Acupuncture seems to be working on this *kosha*. In the healing science of acupuncture, these energy channels called meridians are manipulated to bring about a change of energy flow and therefore removal of disease and attainment of better health. These meridians, conduct ki or chi energy, which is the same as *Prana*.<sup>29</sup>

### Discussion on *Manomaya Kosha*

A direct operation on this level is possible through the culturing of mind by focusing the mind (*Dharana*) initially, followed by relaxed dwelling of the mind in a single thought (*Dhyana*) for longer duration leading ultimately to super consciousness (*Samadhi*).<sup>30</sup>

- Aroma therapies of *Ayurveda* such as *Dhupa* (Fumigation) and *Gandhamalya dharana* (wearing of aromatic garlands), though supplementary therapy of *Ayurveda*, are used mainly for treating the mind. They have great power to stimulate, calm or heal the mind. They aid in concentration and meditation. Soothes the nerves and strengthen the immune system.<sup>31</sup>
- *Ratnabharanam* mentioned in *Ayurveda* has immense importance for the maintenance of mental wellbeing (*Harshanam, Vyasanasoodanam*).

Gems can be used long term to protect and vitalize the body and mind. The mineral and gem preparations mentioned in *Ayurveda* are often used for conditions involving the mind and nervous system.<sup>32</sup>

- Metals and minerals have a strong action upon the mind than herbs.<sup>33</sup>
- *Swedana* (Sudation) therapy aids in the purification of the subtle as well as the gross body.<sup>33</sup>

### Discussion on *Vijnanamaya Kosha*

*Vijnanamaya kosha* continuously guides the *Manomaya Kosha* to get mastery over the basic instincts. Removal of ignorance to unravel the real self will help to eliminate the entire stress. The intellectual analysis in a deeper level reveals the innate source of knowledge. Psychotherapy, health awareness classes, spiritual discourses and counselling seem to be acting on this *kosha*.<sup>34</sup>

### Discussion on *Anandamaya Kosha*

*Anandamaya Kosha* is the bliss layer of our existence, and is the most subtle aspect of our existence which is devoid of any form of emotions. Causal level of detoxification is possible through *Satwic mantras* like 'aum', that acts against the *Manodoshas*. *Ayurveda* uses the *Mantra* therapy to correct the psychological and psychic disorders. Those *Mantras* clear subtle impurities from the nerves and *Nadis* and aid in concentration and creative thinking.<sup>35</sup>

### Practices at various *Kosha*<sup>36</sup>

In the treatment of psychosomatic diseases it becomes mandatory to work at all the *kosha* to bring about the quickest results. Following practices can be adopted for the promotion of health at various *kosha* and thereby improving overall health.

<i>Kosha</i>	Practices	Benefits
<i>Annamaya Kosha</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wholesome diet</li> <li>• Healthy lifestyle</li> <li>• <i>Panchakarma</i> therapies</li> <li>• <i>Suddi kriyas</i></li> <li>• <i>Sithileekarana vyayama</i></li> <li>• <i>Yogasana</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cleanse the inner organs of the body.</li> <li>• Activate and revitalize the organs, toning up their functions, desensitization and development of deep internal awareness.</li> <li>• Stretch and relax the muscles.</li> <li>• Improve the power and develop stamina.</li> <li>• Physical revitalization, deep relaxation, mental calmness.</li> </ul>

<b>Pranamaya Kosha</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Breathing practices</li> <li><i>Pranayama</i></li> <li><i>Suddi kriyas</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remove the random agitations in <i>pranic</i> flows.</li> <li>Improves overall health.</li> </ul>
<b>Manomaya Kosha</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Dharana</i></li> <li><i>Dhyana</i></li> <li><i>Samadhi</i></li> <li>Happy assembly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emotional culture is done through devotional session.</li> <li>Eliminates emotional imbalances and upsurges through happy assembly.</li> </ul>
<b>Vijnanamaya Kosha</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Jnana</i></li> <li>Lecture</li> <li>Yogic Counselling</li> <li>Psychotherapy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Removal of ignorance.</li> <li>Enriches knowledge.</li> </ul>
<b>Anandamaya Kosha</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deep Relaxation Technique (DRT)</li> <li><i>Karmayoga</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experience the thrill and bliss of pure consciousness.</li> <li>Minimizes <i>Karmaphala</i>.</li> </ul>

## CONCLUSION

*Yoga* is a systematic methodology for an all-round personality development at physical, mental, social, intellectual, emotional and spiritual components of man. *Yoga* accelerates the growth of man from his animal level to the higher levels and ultimately to divinity. Theory of *Pancha Kosha* is a way of transformation and transcendence from the lower self to highest self. Knowledge of *Pancha Kosha* helps us to explore our absolute self and reveal our purpose of existence. The 21<sup>st</sup> century is the century of new biology, where consciousness rules the roost. Today we can comprehend much more than what we can grasp with our five senses. This is the new quantum worldview and we can make use of the new knowledge to help the suffering humanity.

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