



CONTEMPLATING THE RELEVANCE OF THEORY OF *PANCHA KOSHA* IN THE PRESENT ERA

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ABSTRACT:

Pancha kosha is the concept in *Yoga* philosophy that there are five layers of awareness through which all experiences are filtered. The concept originated from *Taittiriya Upanishad*, a *vedic* era Sanskrit text embedded within *Yajurveda*. According to *Yoga* Philosophy, our physical body is divided into three bodies and five layers of self being. Each person has a *Sthula sharira* (Physical body) made of organs and systems, *Suksma sharira* (Astral body) constituting mind and intellect, *Karana sharira* (causal body) constitutes quality of spirit. The five layers are called the *Pancha koshas* or sheaths. These layers move from the outermost physical body to the deep spiritual core. In this article we intend to contemplate the practical applicability of these *koshas*, how to try to heighten them to experience the spiritual form of oneself, with the proper practice of *Yoga* and *Ayurveda* and ultimately assist one proceed towards *moksha*.

Key words: *Pancha Kosha*, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, *Yoga*, Astral body, Causal body, Ahara-Vihara.

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INTRODUCTION

Every human being has several necessities in their life. While we talk about necessities, two terminologies come to mind. 'Needs' and 'Wants'. While they seem to have no much difference. But there is definitely a huge difference between these two terms. While we speak about 'Needs', these can be defined as the basic necessities in a person's life, without which it becomes rather difficult to even survive! For instance, the need to have food on our platter. Without quality food one cannot go for long and hence will soon perish. This is not a desire, it's a need. Now what can be called as Wants? These can be considered the things people want to have in their life to level up their standard of living. For instance we can still make a fair living in a 1BHK room with family. But then comes our desires and we begin wanting more, for which we could instantly be ready to do anything it takes and fulfil our desires. One desire would lead to another and the list never ends! To fulfil these wants, people tend to do anything it takes. Minds get corrupted, people begin doing *prajnaparadha*. This simple feeling of wanting more can turn into greed, lust, desires and hence can make us do things we never did, see things we never saw, and hence we are there at the point of life filled with so many sins we cannot get ourselves back! It doesn't mean we

cannot achieve things in a good way though, but we definitely have to differentiate this achievement or success with greed or lust and due to ethical hardwork. For this one has to know about when things switch in one's mind and move towards greed and control it. *Yoga* and meditation has been one among such factors that can make one have a great control over one's mind. This theory of *Pancha Kosha* is all about how one can find a way to have a control on all these things going on in mind and yet have a happy, healthy and satisfactory life.

The theory of *Pancha Kosha*^[1]

1. ***Annamaya Kosha*** (The Food Sheath) – this is the physical frame which is the gross human body. This *kosha* is clearly nourished by the food we intake on a day-to-day basis and forms the *sthoola shareera*. Living through this layer, humans identify themselves as flesh, bone, muscle mass etc. Birth and death are the attributes of this *kosha*. It is visible and dependent. It does not exist before its origination and ceases to exist when perished. It is subjected to origination and destruction every moment.

2. ***Pranamaya kosha*** – (The Vital Energy Sheath) is the sheath composed of *prana*, the vital principle or the force that holds together the body and the mind. It is separate from and subtler from *Annamaya kosha*, pertains to

the *sukshma shareera*. It's one physical manifestation is the breath. In *Ayurveda* we have a concept of 3 *dosha*. *Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha* are the 3 *dosha* which when in the state of equilibrium maintains health and when disturbed will lead to ill-health. *Vata* is again sub-divided into 5 types in which *Prana Vata* is one among. In these 3 *dosha*, *Vata* is the one having the *guna* (property) of *Chala* (movement). Everything in the body moves only with the help of *vata*.

3. ***Manomaya kosha*** – (The Mental Sheath) *Manomaya* means composed of *manas* or mind. The mind along with the five sensory organs is said to constitute the *Manomaya kosha* or “mind-sheath”. This is an aspect where the mind carries its wide range of functions like perception, ego, lust, love, hatred, jealousy, respect, anger, memory, all sorts of emotions. This is a seat of one's pleasure, pain and diversity. It belongs to *sukshma shareera*. *Manomaya kosha* is a person's mental and emotional library, a subtler layer of one's existence. Hence the statement – You are what you think you are.

4. ***Vigyanamaya kosha*** – (The Wisdom Sheath) *Vijnanamaya* means composed of *vijnana*, or intellect, the faculty which discriminates, determines or wills. It consists of intellect and 5 sense organs. This is the sheath of absolute reality. This sheath belongs

to *sukshma shareera*. This sheath is responsible for the intellectual process of reasoning and judgement derived from the subjective experiences.

5. ***Anandamaya kosha*** – (The Bliss Sheath) this is the innermost and the ultimate sheath of one's existence. It forms the *kaarana shareera*. This *kosha* is a reflection of the three divine qualities of the Soul, namely *Sat* (truthfulness), *Chitta* (conscious) and *Ananda* (pleasure). It is the most subtle aspect of our existence devoid of any form of emotions, a state of total silence, complete satisfaction, a state of complete harmony and perfect health.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs^[2]

Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is one of the best known theories of motivation. This theory suggests that people are motivated to fulfil their basic needs before moving on to other more advanced needs. The theory is often displayed as a pyramid. The lowest levels of the pyramid of needs are made up of the most basic needs while the most complex needs are at the top. Once lower level needs have been met people can move on to the next level of needs.

Levels of hierarchy

1. **Physiological Needs** – Most basic category of needs, these are the biological requirements of the human body like food,

sleep, air, drink, shelter etc. if we lack any of these needs, we need to fulfil them in order to motivate ourselves to pursue the higher needs.

2. **Safety and Security Needs** – once the physiological needs are fulfilled, people move towards a little complex needs. The next being the Safety and security needs. Fundamentally this need is to negate certain risks of life and helping individuals maintain their physiological needs in the future. Things like financial security, emotional security, property, health and well-being.

3. **Social Needs** – the third level of human need is social and involves need for love and belongingness. These include family relations, friendships, romantic relationships, social relations, community relations and other organisations if interested like spiritual organisations.

4. **Self Esteem Needs** – This level is the need for appreciation and respect. Participation in professional activities, academic accomplishments, team participation, personal hobbies etc can all play a role in esteem needs. A person has to sense that they are valued by others and feel that they are making a contribution to the world. People who are able to satisfy esteem needs by achieving good self-esteem and the recognition of others, tend to feel confident in their abilities.

5. **Self Actualization Needs.** – *What a man can be, he must be* – Maslow explained, referring to the need people have to achieve their full potential as human beings. Maslow loosely describes self-actualisation as the full use and exploitation of talents, capabilities of a person and they seem to be fulfilling themselves and to be doing the best that they are capable of doing. Maslow added a later stage which he called the **Stage of Transcendence** which was about giving oneself to something beyond oneself. This could be in the form of spirituality and could involve people achieving the purpose in the world.

It is sad to know that although things have been explained in our age-old treatises, we still kind of requires a confirmation from the present world to consider it as a genuine one! This theory of *Pancha Kosha* has been put up as the **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**, not entirely similar but having the similar considerations for in the present era. Just to clarify, now that you know the actual difference between the term 'Wants' and 'Needs', notice that the word Needs has been in use here. Hence the basic necessities for one's existence, explained in the *Pancha Kosha* is also been explained as a basic necessity for one's existence in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

DISCUSSION:

We might have been experiencing few symptoms for a few days and might have approached a doctor for consultation. Doctor might have physically examined, just to get a little surety might have run a few tests. The test results would have been within normal limits. The doctor might have prescribed some basic medications, also sometimes trying to explain it is only in the mind. But we would still not be satisfied and still be experiencing those symptoms. Well in such cases it might really be only in one's mind and this is where the holistic approach has its importance. Holistic approach to treatment is a way where a doctor not just focuses on bodily symptoms but also looks after one's mental and spiritual being and then prescribes medications and therapy based on it. According to *Vedantic* philosophy. *Kosha* is referred to as "sheath", one of five coverings of the *Atma* or Self. The human body has three bodies where all these five *koshas* reside^[3]. They are

1. ***Sthula sharira*** - Food sheath constitutes the physical body.
2. ***Suksma sharira*** - The portion of vital-air sheath combined with mental and intellectual sheaths forms the astral body. The mental and emotional sheaths transmit energy to the physical body via the *Pranamaya kosha*, which alters the

breath to effect change in the mental/emotional states. The subtle body is constituted of passions, desires, emotions, feelings and thoughts. *Pranamaya kosha* or the vital- air sheath interconnects the *Annamaya kosha* (physical body) with the *Manomaya*, *Vijnanamaya*,

3. ***Karana Sharira*** - Bliss sheath consists of impressions or *vasanas* (*Mental imprints*) alone.

1. Annamayakosha: The outermost of the *koshas* is called the sheath of food, or *Annamayakosha*. This is the gross, physical body. *Annamaya Kosha* is matter in the form of the physical body sustained by intake of food. It includes five *jnanendriya* and the five *karmendriya*. This sheath has the most dense and slow vibrational frequency. This body cannot exist without contact with the other *koshas*. Personality of the individual i.e., physique as well as traits depend on the condition of *Annamaya kosha*.

Annamaya Kosha comprises of gross 5 Elements and their subtle elements. Gross elements are *Akasha* (space), *Vayu* (Air), *Agni* (fire), *Jala* (water), and *Prithvi* (earth). Their subtle elements are *Shabda* (sound), *Sparsha* (touch), *Roopa* (form), *Rasa* (taste) and *Gandha* (smell).

When there is disturbed state of Annamaya kosha person may be afflicted with muscular tensions, stiff joints and GIT related disorders.

Practices to Nurture Annamaya Kosha :

Ahara^[4]: Food plays a crucial role in maintenance of health, healthy life starts with healthy food. **Satvika ahara-** *Satva guna* is the Spiritual quality. Food that augments life, firmness of mind, strength, health, happiness and pleasure i.e Simple vegetarian wholesome food. According to *Hatayoga pradipika*, *ahara* which constitutes *Snigdha* and *Madhura rasa* are said to be *Satvika Ahara*.

Vihara^[5]

1)Asana - It is a stable and comfortable posture, which includes a series of postures which stretch and strengthen muscles and tendons and makes all organs of the body start functioning harmoniously when practised in a proper way.

2)Upavasa (Fasting) : it may be total or partial abstinence from food for a particular period, it helps in the refinement of annamaya kosha and it is also an excellent therapy to maintain overall wellness.

2. Pranamaya Kosha: Person cannot simply have a living out of a physical existence. There has to be a force that keeps it going. That force is said to be the *Prana*. Its physical manifestation is the breath. As long as this

vital principle exists in the organisms, life continues. Even though the form of this sheath is subtle, it is very similar to the form of the physical body. *Pranamaya Kosha* ensures the harmonious functioning of these organs by the physiological processes. *Prana* (vital life force) is the basic life energy inside and outside the body. A uniform flow of this life force to each cell of the physical body (*Annamaya Kosha*) keeps it healthy. If there is a disturbance in the flow of prana to any organ, it can lead to dysfunction of that organ at the physical body level.

Pranamaya Kosha comprises five *Pranas* (*Prana, Apana, Udana, Samana* and *Vyana*).

When there is disturbed state of Pranamaya kosha person may be afflicted with imbalance in flow of vital force and Respiratory related disorders.

Practices to Nurture Pranamaya Kosha :

Ahara^[6] : **Satvika ahara-** *Satva guna* is the Spiritual quality. Food that augments life, firmness of mind, strength, health, happiness and pleasure i.e Simple vegetarian wholesome food. As *Annamaya kosha* and *Pranamaya kosha* are interconnected, intake of *Satvika ahara* indirectly facilitates the nurture of *Pranamaya kosha*.

Vihara^[7] : **Pranayama** - it is an important tool to maintain a balanced flow of prana to all organs. *Pranayam* is the fourth of the Eight

Limbs of yoga, In *sanskrit*, *prana* means “ Vital life force” and *Yama* means to gain control . *Pranayam* is a breathing technique used to control, cultivate, and modify the amount, quality flow and direction of vital energy in the body.

3. Manomayakosha : The mind along with the 5 sense organs constitute *Manomaya kosha*. The *Manomaya Kosha* is the mental faculty that receives all the sensory inputs, interprets them as good or bad and desires the good. This *Kosha* is much more powerful than the preceding two *Koshas* and governs them and is, in turn, governed by the two *Koshas* superior to it. It is thus central to human existence.

Manomaya Kosha comprises five *Karmendriyas* or organs of Action – *Vak* (speech) *Pani* (hands), *Pada* (legs), *Payu* (genitals), *Upastha* (excretory organs), *Manas* (perception) *Chitta* (mind stuff) and *Ahankara* (ego).

When there is disturbed state of *Manomaya kosha* person may be afflicted with stress, anxiety and depression and other mental tribulations.

Practices to Nurture Manomaya Kosha :

Ahara^[8] : Satvika ahara- *Satva guna* is the Spiritual quality. Food that augments life, firmness of mind, strength, health, happiness and pleasure i.e Simple vegetarian wholesome

food. According to *Hatayoga pradipika*, *ahara* which constitutes the *guna* of *Shivam sampriti* (which appeases the mind rather than the body or quantity which is consumed) called as *Satvika Ahara*. As *Pranamaya kosha* interconnects the *Annamaya kosha* (physical body) with the *Manomaya, Vijnanamaya kosha* therefore *satvika ahara* also nurtures *Manomaya kosha*.

Vihara^[9]: Dhyana (Meditation)- it is the seventh limb of Eight limbs of *yoga*. Derived from the root words, *Dhi* meaning “receptacle” or “perceive” and *yana* meaning “moving” or “going”. I.e, focusing the mind on a particular object, thought or activity. It is a tool to manage the stress of the mind at all levels.

Music Therapy^[10]: Sonic tools empower mental health, learning and productivity. It is implied that a person listening to the soothing sounds/music gets into a relaxed state and that it influences positively to achieve a more focused state of mind. The clinical use of music is to accomplish stress reduction and improve the mood of individuals. It is an apt method of treatment in psychiatric conditions. It also augments the positive psychological vibrations such as optimism, hope, determination and willpower.

4. Vijnanamaya kosha: It consists of intellect and 5 sense-organs. Not everything you see, listen, feel is an absolute reality. You can only perceive things as much as you have the clarity in your mind about it or proper understanding about it. Only then can you perceive reality. Or everything can be just an illusion. For example you own a nice house, a car, a good family and you are happy in your small world. All this will remain mine forever and obsessing on them is an illusion. Understanding that all this is temporarily mine and what to actually focus on and obsess on in life is reality, is *Vigyana*. Having the understanding of what is actually right and wrong, is reality. Therefore this is the understanding of absolute reality. The feeling of 'me' and 'mine', and the faculty of intelligence and reasoning constitute the *Vijnanamaya Kosha*. When one closes the eyes and relaxes during meditation, the functioning of the *Manomaya Kosha* becomes minimal. The *Vijnanamaya Kosha* comes in the front and gets active. In the final stages of meditation, the intellect becomes stable and the mind becomes still. It is the discriminating factor (inner mind, conscience), which guides the *Manomaya Kosha* constantly to gain mastery over the basic instincts of general life activities like eating, sleeping, mating, fear etc.

Vijnanamaya Kosha comprises five *Jnanendriyas* or senses of cognition *Srotra* (ears), *Tvak* (skin), *Chakshu* (eyes), *Rasana* (tongue), *Ghrana* (nose) and the *Buddhi* (discriminative faculty) in the *Vijnanamaya Kosha*.

When there is disturbed state of *Vijyanamaya kosha* person may be afflicted with distorted cognition, lack of discrimination and wrong perceptions.

Practices to Nurture *Vijyanamaya Kosha*:

Ahara^[11]: *Satvika ahara*- *Satva guna* is the Spiritual quality. Food that augments life, firmness of mind, strength, health, happiness and pleasure i.e Simple vegetarian wholesome food. *Pranamaya kosha* interconnects the *Annamaya kosha* (physical body) with the *Manomaya, Vijnanamaya kosha* therefore *satvika ahara* also nurtures *vijyanamaya kosha*.

Vihara^[12] : According to *Yogic Philosophy*, scriptures are conquering the mind through knowledge. Reading and understanding the concepts of *Veda* and *Upanishad* will help to increase the wisdom and in the current era, where less people go through book reading and are all into socialising, having good relations/communication with people having good knowledge and wisdom (*prajnya*) plays a role.

5. Anandamaya Kosha: is the innermost Kosha in close proximity to the Soul. In *Advaita Vedanta* the *Anandamaya Kosha* is the innermost of the *Pancha Koshas* that cover the *Atma*. Unlike the next three more outer *koshas*, it constitutes the *karana sharira*. This *kosha* is a reflection of the three divine qualities of the Soul, namely *Sat*, *Chitta* and *Ananda*. *Sat* means that it believes in truthfulness and its eternalness. *Chitta* means that it is alive and conscious and can therefore interact with various situations in an appropriate way. This characteristic separates the living and the non-living. *Ananda* means that it is ever joyful- full of pleasure in itself. It does not need any outside stimulus to be cheerful. Being joyful is a prominent characteristic of this Kosha. *Anandamaya Kosha*. It leads to the insight that happiness is within us, and each one of us in our causal state is *Ananda* (bliss) embodied. At *Anandamaya Kosha*, action-in relaxation, selflessness and service attitude is practised to experience bliss continually. It is when a person reaches this stage of sheath, he is divulged from the vicious cycle of birth and death and ultimately attains *Moksha* (salvation) It is in this search of one's motto of existence you tend to cross all these sheaths within you and reach the ultimate reality of

finding yourself, finding yourself in the *Anandamaya kosha*.

Anandamaya Kosha comprises latent impression or *vasanas* (it refers to a past impression in the mind that influences the present behaviour of a person)

When there is disturbed state of *Anandamaya kosha* person may be afflicted with disharmony and unhappiness.

Practices to Nurture Anandamaya Kosha:

Ahara^[13] : *Satva guna* is the Spiritual quality. Food that augments life, firmness of mind, strength, health, happiness and pleasure i.e Simple vegetarian wholesome food. All the *kosha* are interconnected with each other. Maintaining the health of each of the *kosha* also has the effect on the prior or the next *kosha*. This being the last one, when all the above *kosha* are in their proper state of functioning, by the virtue of intake of *satva aahara*, also facilitates *Anadamaya kosha*.

Vihara^[14] : *Samadhi* is the eighth and final step on the path of *yoga*, the word is derived from "*Sam*" meaning "together" or "completely" and *Dhi* means "put" ie interpretations range from "bliss" to "liberation" and even "enlightment". *Samadhi* is a state of intense concentration achieved through highly evolved meditation. One can attain this by practising concentration patiently and diligently for as long as it takes to train your

mind to remain focused, ultimately achieving the state of Blissful.

A research was done on “Effect of Integrated Yoga Practice on Pancha Koshas (Five Sheaths) in healthy young adults-A Matched waitlist Control Trial”, the results of which were – ‘Practicing yoga regularly for longer durations has been shown to influence five sheaths of the body positively. When compared between the groups, those practicing yoga for one year had significantly increase in spinal flexibility and autonomic variables, following psychological assessment, cancellation & substitution task and happiness index. Studies have shown the possibilities of improving the balance and flexibility following long term practice of yoga. ‘Overall, the integrated practice of yoga for 12 months among healthy individuals had an effect on all the Five Sheaths of the human body. This study showed that 12 months of Integrated Yoga Module (IYM) had improvements in Spinal flexibility, Heart rate and respiratory variables, psychological assessment, Letter Cancellation task & Substitution task and Happiness Index among healthy Individuals ^[15].

CONCLUSION

Growth has never been a one-time thing; it has always been a process. For instance, to grow from being a child to an adult and then to becoming an elderly there is

a certain process and time that follows. Now when we speak about growth, we come across several aspects of growth like personal growth, physical growth, professional growth, academic growth, spiritual growth, financial growth and so on. Are all these growths fulfilled at once? Are the necessities to fulfil them the same? Is everyone successful in fulfilling these requirements and be able to grow oneself in all aspects? Absolutely No! To fulfil these growths, we require to work on and fulfil certain criteria related to them individually. Nothing comes without putting in effort. And also, not every growth we need has one way to achieve it. They are different to different people and one does it according to their understanding and capability. Many people tend to believe that they are just the physical existence and are consumed solely by the physical form. While there is much more to a human than just the material body. Is it so that when a person ages, he/she is also growing more towards self-actualization? Well, maybe not, growing up is more than just getting older. One’s age does not necessarily reflect one’s maturity! And hence it is a need of hour to understand the concept of body in regards to physical, astral and causal body.

For Maslow, a person is always 'becoming' and never remains static. In self-actualization, a person comes to find a

meaning to life that is important to them. The basics of Maslow's theory is that we are motivated by our needs. Additionally, if some of our basic needs are unmet, we may be unable to progress and meet the other needs. This can define why we feel stuck at times! It can be possible that our most critical needs aren't met, preventing us from being the best version of ourselves. *Yoga* and *Ayurveda* are ancient Indian sciences and a way of living which brings about relaxation and also induces a balanced state of mind. *Yoga* and *Ayurveda* in proper practices intend to act at physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual levels. This *yoga* program is derived from principles that promote health at all levels. While we live in a culture that desires immediate results, spiritual maturity is something that requires great commitment and discipline. The idea of *Pancha kosha* does consider the body as a holistic mechanism and remotely considers that if, for instance, my liver is not working properly it may not be the problem of the liver at all. This is where the ancient approach to holistic wellness plays a critical role. If we go by the theory of *Pancha kosha* for health problems, we understand the body not just as an energy field with multiple layers of existence and each one interrelated and affecting the other. This approach manages to trace the root cause of most problems (which

do not arise in the physical body but in the other subtle bodies) and not to just fix the manifestation that shows up in the physical body. It is important to note that self-actualization is a continual process of becoming, rather than a perfect state one reaches of a 'happy ever after' (Hoffman, 1988). Having gone through all these *kosha*'s of your existence and its associated practices, you will gradually relieve yourself from the bondages and constrictions of each *kosha*. Having come in peace with all these aspects of life, ultimately reaching the goal of one's existence – *Moksha*!

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