

The Koshas: Theory of Evolution of the Consciousness

Aarsh Ojas Parasar Pandey^{1*}, Prof. Nihar Ranjan Mishra²

ABSTRACT

There have been numerous theories and ideas proposed to understand the human personality and the consciousness by the modern psychologists. Each school of modern psychology has described these concepts according to the perspective of their respective schools. Almost all the schools differ from and contradictory to each other. No any holistic approach has been made to understand the human personality and the human consciousness. In the Indian subcontinent there have been various theories and principles proposed by our ancient philosophers and sants or sages. These are holistic in nature. The principle of Panchakosha is one of them. According to this, human beings have five dimensions of existence. These are also known as the five sheaths of our body. These five sheaths or koshas are: the Annamaya Kosha (the food body), the Pranamaya Kosha (the prana body), the Manomaya Kosha (the mental body), the Vijyanamaya Kosha (the intuitive body), and the Anandamaya Kosha (the bliss body). These koshas are hierarchical in nature. There is a need to re-study these and to do research upon these concepts principles and theories. These theories and principles can give greater insight to understand the human being, their mind and the consciousness in a holistic manner.

Keywords: Kosha, Types of Kosha, Psychological Dimension, Physiological State

For thousands of years ago yogis have been saying that man's being extends far beyond what the normal eyes can perceive. Everyone is aware of themselves through their capacity to perceive. Our existence is far more than matter and cognition. Ones we able to experience the body and mind through our subtle eyes, we could experience the body behind the body and the mind behind the mind. The subtler we would go, would realize different dimensions of our consciousness or of our existence, and at the end we would able to experience the absolute reality of our existence. The life evolves when one moves from the outermost sheath of the physical body (sthula sarira) to the core of the existence, the Anandamaya Kosha, related to the karana sarira. It is viewed as the journey of the consciousness from lower psychical centre to the highest psychical or the divine centre (Muktibodhananda, 2004).^[1]

The chapter Brahmandavalli of Taittiriya Upanishad which is the part of Tattiriya Samhita of the Krishna Yajurveda, describes man as being having five dimensions of existence

¹PhD Research Scholar, NIT Rourkela, India

²Associate Professor, NIT Rourkela, India

*Corresponding Author

Received: May 05, 2021; Revision Received: May 14, 2021; Accepted: May 31, 2021

The Koshas: Theory of Evolution of the Consciousness

(Swami Gambhirananda, 1958; Swami Shivananda, 1983).^{[2], [3]} These five dimensions are termed as the *panch koshas*. The term *panch* means five and *kosha* means sheath. Each kosha indicates a particular dimension or sphere of existence. It is the theory of evolution of the consciousness from one level to the next. The panch koshas are: Annamaya Kosha, Pranamaya Kosha, Manomaya Kosha, Vijyanmaya Kosha, and Anandamaya Kosha. The connection between all these five koshas is very complex. They influence and interact with one another continuously.

The science of panchakoshas is one of the earliest attempts to understand the personality. Each koshas exhibits some certain characteristics and level of consciousness (Satpathi, 2018).^[4] All the five koshas are in hierarchical system where Annamaya Kosha is at the lower level and Anandamaya Kosha is at the highest level. One can't reach to a higher level of kosha without awakening the lower level. Understanding personality of human being is very interesting through this perspective. It must become the focus of the personality psychologists.

In Indian philosophical or psychological view point there are four stages or categories of mind: conscious, subconscious or preconscious, unconscious, and the superconscious (Muktibodhananda, 2004).^[5] Superconscious is the highest level of consciousness. Here the person frees from all the bondages and achieve the stage of Moksha. These levels of mind and consciousness are also related to these koshas.

According to Yoga we have three bodies; Sthula Sarira (the physical body), Sukshma Sarira (the subtle body), and Karana Sarira (the causal body). The panch koshas are also related to these three categories of body. Anandamaya kosha and pranamaya kosha is constitute the sthula sarira. Manomaya kosha and vijyanamaya kosha constitute the sukshma sarira. The karana sarira is made up of the anandamaya kosha (Srivastava, 2012).^[6]

Annamaya kosha is the first sheath. It is also called as the *food body*. It is composed of food or anna. Here, food means the matter. It is the physical body or mind concerned with our physical existence. It is related to the conscious mind. This sheath is considered as the medium of enjoyment for physical objects through the physical senses. Food is the cause of our birth and the life as well. Birth, growth, change, decay and, finally death are its qualities. All beings, whatever exists on the earth, are born of food and sustain their life through the food and again they go back into it at the end (Swami Sarvananda, 1921).^[7]

Pranamaya kosha is the second sheath. It is also termed as the *pranic body*. It is composed of prana or the vital force. It is also related to the conscious mind i.e., the stage of wakeful awareness. It is the bridge between the conscious and the subconscious mind. There are ten pranas flow in our body in which five are of greater concern. These are: *prana, apana, samana, udana,* and *vyana*. The other five are called *upaprana* or *sub-prana*. *Prashnopanishad* explains the relation between these five pranas and five upapranas as "chief prana allots functions to the lower pranas as an emperor posts his officials in different parts of his domain". *Kaushitaki Upanishad* explains how each sense has its own prana. Normally we experience prana, when it manifests in the form of the breath (Feuerstein, 2001).^[8] Pranas are the mediating link between body and mind.

Manomaya kosha is the third sheath. It is also called as the *mental body*. It is composed of manas or mind. It is the bridge between the conscious mind and the unconscious mind. Here, the experiences of subconscious mind happen. This kosha deals with the emotions and

The Koshas: Theory of Evolution of the Consciousness

cognitions. It is responsible for all cognitive and emotional processes. Beghetto & Kaufman, 2007; Richards, 2007 says that this mind is concerned with ‘everyday creativity’.^{[9], [10]}

Vijyanmaya kosha is the forth sheath. It is also termed as the *intuitive body*. It is composed of inner knowledge or intuition and wisdom. It is related to unconscious mind. It is the stage of transition from unconscious mind to the superconscious mind. It is the stage of enhanced awareness and some spiritual realization (Feuerstein, Kak, & Frawley, 1995).^[11]

Anandamaya kosha is the fifth and the last sheath of the consciousness. It is also known as the *bliss body*. It is the stage where the superconscious mind activates. It is the stage of complete transcendence (Raina, 2016).^[12] It is the state of *Sthitaprajya* as described in Srimadbhagvadgeeta. It is the stage where all the yogis, sants, sages live. It is the stage of all the positive feelings which are independent of all the external affairs and any object. This sheath is the most subtle of all (Combs, 1993).^[13]

Swami Muktibodhananda explains how the koshas are related to the psychological dimensions of the mind, the physiological state and how these experienced. He has prepared a table to show these relations (Muktibodhananda, 2004).^[14]

Table 1: Kosha or Body on psychological dimension, physiological state and experience

Kosha or Body	Psychological Dimension	Physiological State	Experienced as
Annamaya Kosha (food body)	Conscious Mind	Wakeful Awareness	Awareness of physical body
Pranamaya Kosha (pranic body)	Conscious Mind	Wakeful Awareness	Awareness of physiological functions
Manomaya Kosha (mental body)	Subconscious Mind	Dreaming Awareness	Awareness of mental and emotional processes
Vijyanamaya Kosha (intuitive body)	Subconscious & Unconscious Mind	Dreaming Awareness	Awareness of psychic and casual dimensions
Anandamaya Kosha (bliss body)	Unconscious Mind to Superconscious Mind	Deep Sleep/Meditative Awareness	Unconsciousness; Transcendental Awareness

The principles and practices described in the swara yoga enable one to achieve the stage of Anandamaya kosha i.e., the stage of total transcendence. Swara yoga belongs to the tantric tradition of knowledge. It is the ancient science of pranic body rhythms which emphasises how the flow of prana can be controlled by manipulating the breath. The principles and techniques of swara yoga enable the state of union or the state of yoga to be reached by means of one’s breath.

According to swara yoga, by feeling the breath in the nose and acting in accordance with the swara, one can utilize the conscious mind and the physical body or the *annamaya kosha* more effectively. Through the manipulation of the flow of breath and prana Pranamaya Kosha can be stimulated. By the means of concentration one can utilizes Manomaya Kosha. Practicing trataka on the tattwa (panch tattwa) yantra awakens Vijyanmaya Kosha. There is

The Koshas: Theory of Evolution of the Consciousness

no any specific practice or technique is described for awakening the Anandamaya Kosha (Muktibodhananda, 2004).^[15] Here no any effort is required. After reaching the vijyanamaya kosha, the anandamaya kosha itself awakens.

CONCLUSION

Panchakosha principle is one of the earliest attempts by the East (India) to understand the human personality and the evolution of the consciousness. This principle provides very deeper insight in the study of personality as well as consciousness, than all the modern theories. It is holistic in nature. It not only describes some components, stages, dimensions, or categories of personality but also describe how to achieve the stage of complete transcendent. The techniques discussed in the texts for reaching the higher levels of the consciousness enables one to achieve the bliss (ananda) which is not dependent upon any objects and the events of the external world. Panchakosha principle provides a royal way to achieve complete physical, mental, and spiritual health. All the theories and principles of personality and consciousness developed in the East are similar in one manner. This is, the ultimate goal of the human being is to achieve the state of complete transcendence. This is the beauty of Indian philosophy. No any modern psychological theories discussed about the state of total transcendent and how to achieve it. Now we must focus on our ancient knowledge. This is the need of the recent world. Researchers should do research upon these and should make tests and measurements based on these principles. Indigenous psychology should be in focus. This paper is an attempt to draw attention towards the ancient Indian wisdom in the field of psychology.

REFERENCES

- [1] Muktibodhananda, Swami. (2004): Swara Yoga; Bihar School of Yoga, Munger, Bihar, p-41.
- [2] Swami Gambhirananda. (1958). Eight Upanishads with the commentary of Sri Sankaracharya, Vol-1, Kolkata, India: Advaita Ashrama.
- [3] Swami Shivananda. (1983). The principal Upanishads. Rishikesh, India: The Divine Life Trust.
- [4] Satpathy B. (2018). Pancha Kosha Theory of Personality. International Journal of Indian Psychology, 6(2), 33-39. DIP:18.01.105/20180602, DOI:10.25215/0602.105
- [5] Muktibodhananda, Swami. (2004): Swara Yoga; Bihar School of Yoga, Munger, Bihar, p-39.
- [6] Srivastava K. (2012). Concept of personality: Indian perspective, Ind Psychiatry J. 21(2): 89–93.
- [7] Swami Sharvananda. (1921). Taittiriya Upanishad. (With Sanskrit text, paraphrased with word-for-word literal translation, English rendering and comments). Mylapore, Madras, India: The Ramakrishna Math.
- [8] Feuerstein G. (2001). The Yoga tradition, its history, literature, philosophy and practice. Prescott, AZ: Hohm Press.
- [9] Beghetto R. A., & Kaufman, J. C. (2007). Toward a broader conception of creativity: A case for “mini-c” creativity. Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts, 1, 73-79.
- [10] Richards R. (2007). Everyday creativity and new views of human nature. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- [11] Feuerstein G., Kak S., & Frawley D. (1995). In Search of the cradle of civilization. Wheaton, IL: Quest Books.

The Koshas: Theory of Evolution of the Consciousness

- [12] Raina M. K. (2016). The levels of Human Consciousness and Creative Functioning: Insights from the Theory of Pancha Kosha (Five Sheaths of Consciousness). *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 48(2), 168-89.
- [13] Combs A. (1993). The evolution of consciousness: A theory of historical and personal transformation. *World Futures*, 38, 43-62.
- [14] Muktibodhananda, Swami. (2004): *Swara Yoga*; Bihar School of Yoga, Munger, Bihar, p-39.
- [15] Muktibodhananda, Swami. (2004): *Swara Yoga*; Bihar School of Yoga, Munger, Bihar, p-40.

Acknowledgement

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Pandey A O P & Mishra N R (2021). The Koshas: Theory of Evolution of the Consciousness. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 9(2), 1197-1201. DIP:18.01.126.20210902, DOI:10.25215/0902.126