**The Body – A Sheath**

**A contemporary dance production based on Bharathanatyam, choreographed and presented by Chamu Kuppuswamy, Lead Dancer, Nandavana Dance Group, Sheffield.**

**Music : ‘Colours of India’, Ganesh and Kumaresh, Tracks 3 and 4, 2003.**

**The Concept**

This piece presents interdisciplinary thinking about the notion of the body. Philosophy, psychology, consciousness studies etc come together. The mainstream modern disciplinary boundaries are blurred to a large extent and I think this contains a lot of joined up thinking. Perhaps surprisingly, it comes from some ancient writing and thinking on the nature of the Self and Reality.

The *Taittiriya Upanishad* describes the individual as made up of five sheaths or *koshas*, of which the physical body as we know it is called the *‘annamaya’ kosha*. The other four are *pranamaya kosha* (energy or vital forces sheath)*, manomaya kosha* (psychic or mental sheath)*, vijnanamaya kosha* ( form of discriminative wisdom/intelligence or self-awareness sheath) and *anandamaya kosha* (blissful sheath/form of pristine innocence).

Eliot Deustch says the analysis of the empirical or phenomenal self in Advaita Vedanta, as we reconstruct it, is primarily a ‘phenomenology’ of consciousness. He goes on to say, Advaita does not so much explain the self as it describes the process by which we come to believe that it exists. So the Advaitic analysis of the empirical or qualified self is concerned to answer this question: ‘By what process of mis-identification do we form the belief in the reality of what is in fact an illusory appearance?’ (‘Advaita Vedanta: A philosophical reconstruction’, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 1973, p.55)

Interestingly in a reference to medicine and an alternative conception of the body, Dr Bhaskar Vyas, a physician and commentator on Vedanta, writes that if modern medicine develops a software of transduction of such psycho-philosophical concepts with the scientific approach of the present time, much of the present day gadgets and sophisticated techniques may become akin to plumbing activities’. (‘Alternative Path to Healing’, Vedanta Kesari, Vol. 85, August 1998, p.316)

The body is a dynamic entity that is considered instrumental in existence. However it is not considered essential to the Self.

This dance piece unravels the idea of the body or indeed bodies, in Hindu Thought by using an event that affects the body - death. The impact of death on the body is presented. The death of the body results in the inertness of the gross body or annamaya kosha and dissociation between that particular annamaya kosha and the other four koshas. The death of the annamaya kosha brings into focus the vital being, which is not extinguished or rendered inert. The five breaths (prana, apana, vyana, samana and udhana) that constitute the subtle vital being or the pranamaya kosha through the process of panchi-karana set about manufacturing the next annamaya kosha. While the physicality of the combination is determined through the panchikarana, the cause is determined by the combined experience of the manomaya kosha and the vijnanamaya kosha (the other two layers of subtle bodies) when housed in the annamaya kosha that has just died. The overseer of this process is the anandamaya kosha, which essentially is responsible for the maintenance of the identity of the individual Self as it is closest to Reality, it is considered to be in the proximate vicinity of Reality. It is ‘deep sleep consciousness’ that acts as a witness to the subtle and gross components of the individual Self. It contains a back-up copy of the combined experience or karma. The nature of the anandamaya kosha as ‘bliss’thoughts, is elaborated by S. Chinmayananda as ‘ the modification of Nescience which is kissed by a reflection of the Atman’, based on Sankara’s Vivekachoodamani in verse 207 – ‘ananda prathibimba chumbitha thanurvritti thamorjrimbitha’. (Swami Chinmayananda, ‘ Talks on Sankara’s Vivekachoodamani (Text with translation and commentary)’, Central Chinmaya Mission Trust, Mumbai, 2001, p.262)

Anandamaya kosha could be strong or weak depending on vasanas left by karma, thereby creating one of a range of different strengths of blissful thoughts. Anandamaya kosha resides in the other sheaths. The functioning of the Pranamaya kosha, Manomaya kosha and Vigjanamaya kosha are implicitly also indicating that the Anandamaya kosha resides in these koshas.

Birth is the identification by the Anandamaya kosha of/with a design of annamaya kosha (design parameters laid out by determined by karma), and acquisition of a name and form through the regrouping of tanmatras (panchikarana process).

**The Act**

Five part act

Part I – Body + nature continuum

Part II – Five Koshas (Body + mind continuum)

Part III – Karma

Part IV – Karma separates the Annamaya kosha from other four koshas: DEATH

Part V – Anandamaya kosha determines the annamaya kosha: BIRTH

CK

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