

## ***Understanding Human Beings Through the Lens of Indian Philosophy***

**- Dr. Ganesh Rao**

*Before diving into the intricacies of biochemistry and other scientific realms, it's essential to take a step back and consider how we view human beings. This perspective, especially from an Indian philosophical standpoint, can provide profound insights into our approach to health and well-being.*

*In Indian philosophy, human beings—and indeed everything in the universe—are seen as a combination of two fundamental forces: consciousness and energy. These forces manifest in various forms across different philosophical and spiritual traditions. In tantra and Taoism, they are represented as yin and yang. In psychology, they appear as the feminine and masculine principles. In Advaita Vedanta, they are referred to as Brahman and Maya, and in Sankhya philosophy, they are purusha (consciousness) and prakriti (matter/energy). No matter the tradition, these two forces are the building blocks of all existence.*

*When we apply this understanding to human beings, we see that we, too, are composed of these two fundamental forces. The physical body and the mind are manifestations of energy. The physical body, known as sthula sharira or the gross body, and the mind, referred to as sukshma sharira or the subtle body, both originate from this energy. However, if we were to arrange these in a hierarchy, the body is grosser than the mind, the mind grosser than energy, and energy grosser than consciousness. Ultimately, consciousness encompasses everything.*

*This holistic composition of human beings suggests that all forms of therapy—whether consciously or unconsciously—focus primarily on the body and the mind, often neglecting the energy that underlies both. Yet, it's this very energy that gives rise to the body and the mind. Therefore, it is crucial to acknowledge and engage with this energy in a tangible way.*

*The mind, as many have noted, plays a crucial role in health. It is widely recognized that the majority of psychosomatic and emotional disturbances stem from the mind. When the mind is kept happy and stable, the body tends to remain healthy as well. However, controlling the mind solely through willpower or by using chemicals (such as medications) is often a challenging, if not impossible, task. As we evolve, reliance on willpower alone becomes increasingly insufficient.*

*In the ancient tradition of yoga, the concept of Pranayama addresses this challenge. Etymologically, Pranayama is derived from "Prana" (life force or energy) and "Yama" (control). It involves controlling the life force within us by stretching and expanding it. Unfortunately, many who practice Pranayama today are only engaging in breathing exercises, rather than truly accessing the deeper levels of Prana. While breathing exercises provide benefits, such as increased oxygen intake, tapping into the pranic level offers a transformation that is not just a difference in degree but in kind.*

*This concept is evident in practices like Kundalini Yoga, where the awakening of Kundalini Shakti is said to bring about a mutation of brain and body cells. Scientific research, including studies by microbiologists, has shown that our mental environment can even influence gene expression. This understanding is closely related to the principles of cancer care and holistic health.*

*The energy within us, represented by Prana, serves as a bridge between the body and the mind. This energy is most tangibly expressed through our breathing patterns. Every emotional state we experience is reflected in the way we breathe—whether it's rapid and erratic when angry, gasping when surprised, or slow and deep when calm. By focusing on our breath and practicing controlled, slow, and deep breathing, we can increase our capacity to handle stress and improve our overall health.*

*Beyond energy, consciousness—or the spirit—is another crucial aspect of our being. Spirituality, often misunderstood as synonymous with religion, actually refers to aligning with this consciousness. Being spiritual means being more aware, and this awareness is distinct from mere wakefulness. True awareness, or sakshi bhaav (witnessing consciousness), allows us to respond to situations rather than merely react. It is this state of awareness that all forms of meditation seek to cultivate.*

*Meditation, as the highest practice in various spiritual traditions, helps us experience this awareness by quieting the mind and stilling the body, allowing consciousness to be the sole focus. In this state, physical and mental ailments, known as vyadhi and adhi, respectively, dissipate, leading to true health and well-being.*

*In conclusion, by understanding human beings through the interplay of body, mind, energy, and consciousness, we can approach health and healing in a holistic manner. This perspective offers a comprehensive methodology that integrates yoga, Pranayama, meditation, and other spiritual practices to address not just physical and mental health, but the very essence of our being. The question we must ask ourselves is whether we truly understand and practice yoga in its fullest sense, or whether we are merely engaging with a diluted version of its profound teachings.*

**DR. GANESH RAO**  
*Professor*  
*Ph.D, Yoga & Philosophy,*  
*KKKSU & Mumbai University*

