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Integrated Understanding of Personality Based on *Prakṛti*: Evidence-based Analysis Towards A Wellness Philosophy

Dr. Shilpa Datar

ABSTRACT

The author explores the understanding of *Prakṛti* and the different concepts that combine to make it a holistic and evidence-based scientific theory. An analysis of *Prakṛti* to facilitate better understanding of patients and clients in a clinical setting, as well as for larger domain of psychology has immense implications both in the short and long term. The world wide acceptance of *Āyurveda* and *Yoga* and familiarity of its principles set the stage for Psychologists to adopt this *Prakṛti* based theoretical framework for practice, leading to richer interactions in both clinical as well as non-clinical settings, making the field of psychology pervasive and common across different divisive theories and across different countries that exist today. This would also pave the way for a unified theory of psychology rather than a fragmented one that is pervasive today. The field of Psychology would benefit immensely from these holistic adoptions.

Keywords: *Prakṛti*, Wellness, Well-being, Holistic health, *Tridoṣas*, *Triguṇas*, *Āyurveda*, *Āyurvedic* typology, Psychology, Indian Psychology.

1. INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization (WHO) (<https://www.who.int/about/who-we-are/constitution>), in its preamble to its Constitution, defines wellbeing as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”. Wellbeing is also variously defined as a state of “being comfortable, healthy or happy”, “how people evaluate their lives in terms of affect (how we feel) and cognition (how we think)” among a host of others. The “WHO realized at Alma Ata in 1978 the role of traditional, alternative and complementary systems of medicine in the healthcare sectors of both developing and the developed nations with the slogan of

"Health for All". *Āyurveda* traditional medicine (TRM) of India as per WHO], the holistic science of medicine, as practiced and utilized by Indians at large since centuries, is getting global at present by virtue of its qualitative strength, essential elements of health and important clues for consistent functioning of life. Worldwide recognition of academic courses in *Āyurveda* is an additional accreditation of the establishment of wellness centers in general and its therapeutics value as a system of medicine in particular." (Chaudhary & Singh, 2011).

In continuation of its support to *Āyurveda* and acknowledgement of it being a millennia old science of medicine, WHO has also brought out a publication in collaboration with The Regional Government of Lombardy, Government of India, Faculty of *Āyurveda* at Banares Hindu University, and so on, titled "Benchmarks for Training in *Āyurveda*-2010". This underscores the importance *Āyurveda* plays on the world stage in health and wellness, and in prevention of life-style and other diseases as the first line of treatment to stay healthy, in both body and mind.

Essentially, *Āyurveda* is both accepted and acknowledged the world over, as a science that studies the *Prakṛti* of a person to ensure it is in balance, to enhance wellness, which is the primary step for all decisions related to treatments and prognosis are based upon. This science is so popular that there are colleges and universities set up to study it in many countries all over the world.

The question for psychology today is this: Can we use the principles of *Āyurveda* and its philosophy of wellness and import it into the domain of Psychology, and further develop the concept and theory of wellness of the mind or *Manas*, in our daily work and interactions with people? Can this philosophy and subsequent theory be holistic enough to be applicable to people all over the world, instead of the fragmented application based on situational application that is prevalent today? The beginning of the answer lies in trying to understand the wholeness of the theory of *Prakṛti* and how we can use it in our understanding of people in our daily life, to incorporate the apparent disparateness of behaviour that we see around us in a framework that accommodates it and gives us answers to the "Why?" that bothers us.

To answer this question, an understanding of what *Prakṛti* is, and how its philosophy and theory can benefit the field of Psychology, is essential.

2. What is *Prakṛti*?

Prakṛti is explained as an amalgamation of three factors, which are inseparable from one another, which are essential to understand a person, holistically. They are spoken of as being a tripod, on which the whole of an individual's being is built upon. (CS, 1-

55). They are the physical, psychological and the spiritual aspect of human life. All three are essential to understand behaviour and co-exist with one another. They are always in unison, and never exist without the other, until death does them part.

To explain this inextricable intertwining of one with the other, we need to look at the basis of *Āyurveda* theory. And that is the *Pañca Mahābhūta* theory that is the cornerstone of not only *Āyurveda*, but also the entire Vedic tradition. The *Pañca Mahābhūta* theory is alluded to not only in the Vedas, but is explained in depth in the *Darśanas*, *Upaniṣads*, *Upa-Vedas*, *Purāṇas* and other important sources of Indian thought and culture.

The different *Darśanas* (there are six) of India, do not believe in the Cartesian dichotomy of the body and the mind. In fact, all the *Śaḍ Darśana-s* believe in the inextricable interrelatedness of the body and the mind, the *deha Prakṛti* and the *mānasika Prakṛti*, a complete understanding of which is what *Prakṛti* is all about.

This *Pañca Mahābhūta* theory, is prevalent not only in Indian culture, but it can be seen in the thoughts of other religions across the world too, where it is believed that life is born from dust and has to go back to dust upon death. So, this theory of the 5 proto elements (an approximation only), is prevalent across the world, but finds its scientific basis and delineation in *Sāṃkhya* philosophy and is later adopted and built upon by *Āyurveda* and *Yoga* and achieves its perfection of thought and principles in these disciplines. These two disciplines, *Āyurveda* and *Yoga*, enable utilizing of the *Pañca Mahābhūta* theory to accomplish the goal of modern life, to prevent the onset of disease states and stay healthy, by achieving a sound body and a healthy mind.

3. *Pañca Mahābhūta Theory*

The *Pañca Mahābhūta*, (PMB) - *Ākāśa* (Ether), *Vāyu* (air), *Agni* (fire), *Ap* (water) and *Prthivī* (earth) and their evolution from one to the other is central to Indian philosophy and all schools of thought. *Sāṃkhya* philosophy, which is atheistic, delineates the complete theory of *Pañca Mahābhūta*, their evolution and how it is the basis of the formation of the entire world as well all life including humans. (Shilpa & Murthy, 2012 b). While the world is called as *Brahmāṇḍa*, this human form is called as *Pinḍāṇḍa*.

Āyurveda and *Yoga* are totally based on *Sāṃkhya* philosophy. *Sāṃkhya* philosophy is atheistic. While *Āyurveda* goes deeper into the medical implications of these principles, *Yoga* adds another facet "*Īśvara Pranidhāna*" and makes it completely theistic. *Āyurveda* delves into how each of these PMB combine with each other at the physical level to form the *Tridoṣa* of *Vāta*, *Pitta* and *Kapha* as also how the same PMB combine with each other to form the *Triguṇas* of *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas* at the psychological level.

Vāta Doṣa is composed of *Ākāśa* (ether) and *Vayu* (air) *Mahābhūta*.

Pitta Doṣa is composed of *Tejas* or *Agni* (fire) and *Ap* *Mahābhūta*.

Kapha Doṣa is composed of *Ap* (water) and *Pr̥thivī* (earth) *Mahābhūta*.

These *Tridoṣa* and *Triguṇas* interact with each other (the physical and psychological) to give rise to an individual who has her (his) own unique way of thinking, feeling, responding, behaving and interacting with the world around. The third aspect of *Jīva* or *Ātma* or loosely translated in English to mean the soul is inseparable from the other two and is also an important aspect of understanding an individual. It is because of this tripartite understanding which is inseparable from each other, that *Āyurveda* and *Yoga* are holistic, and also the reason they give answers to questions that may not yet be formed in our minds. (Shilpa & Murthy, 2011).

4. *Sāṃkhya* underpinnings

To understand the *Sāṃkhya* theory of evolution, the following diagram would be easy to understand rather than an elaborate explanation:

The above diagram clearly elaborates the evolution of the world into the 24 *Tattvas*, evolution from subtle elements to their gross forms and finally to the sense and sense

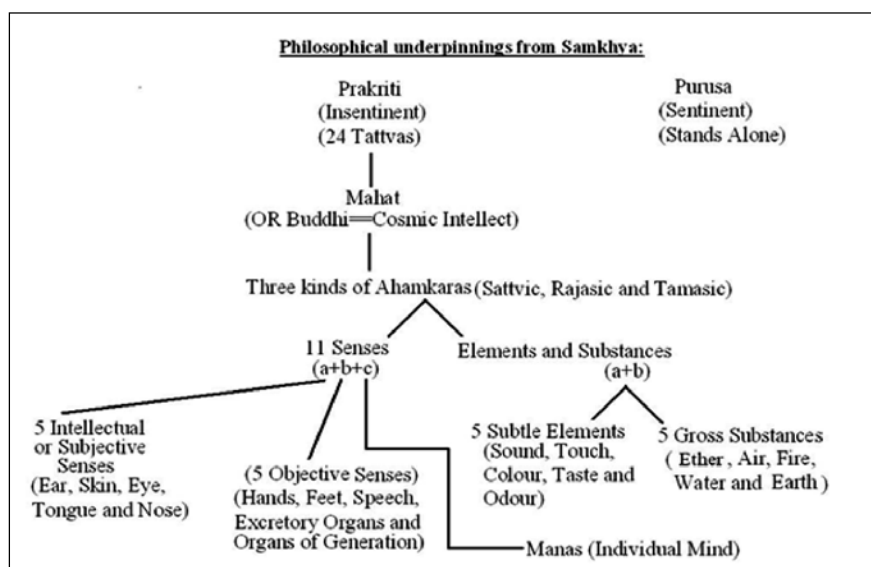


Diagram 1: Pictorial representation of the *Sāṃkhya* (Jha, 2004) philosophical underpinnings of the evolution of this world and man, and is self-explanatory. The information is based on *Sāṃkhya* Philosophy; this pictorial representation is that of the author only and not from any other source.) (Shilpa & Murthy, 2012c).

organs in living beings. (This is common to all living beings and not just Homo Sapiens; there is a slightly different evolution for plants as they lack the organs that we have, which is outside the scope of this paper).

5. Evolution of *Pañca Tanmātras* to form the organs and organ systems

The *Pañca Tanmātras* are subtler than the *Pañca Mahābhūta*. The *Mahābhūta* evolve from the respective *Tanmātras*. To better understand this evolution, the following diagram would help the specific combination of the PMB to form the specific organ and organ systems:

This diagram too clearly explains how each of the *Pañca Tanmātra* (subtler than the *Pañca Mahābhūta*) evolve to the respective *Mahābhūta* and how they in turn evolve

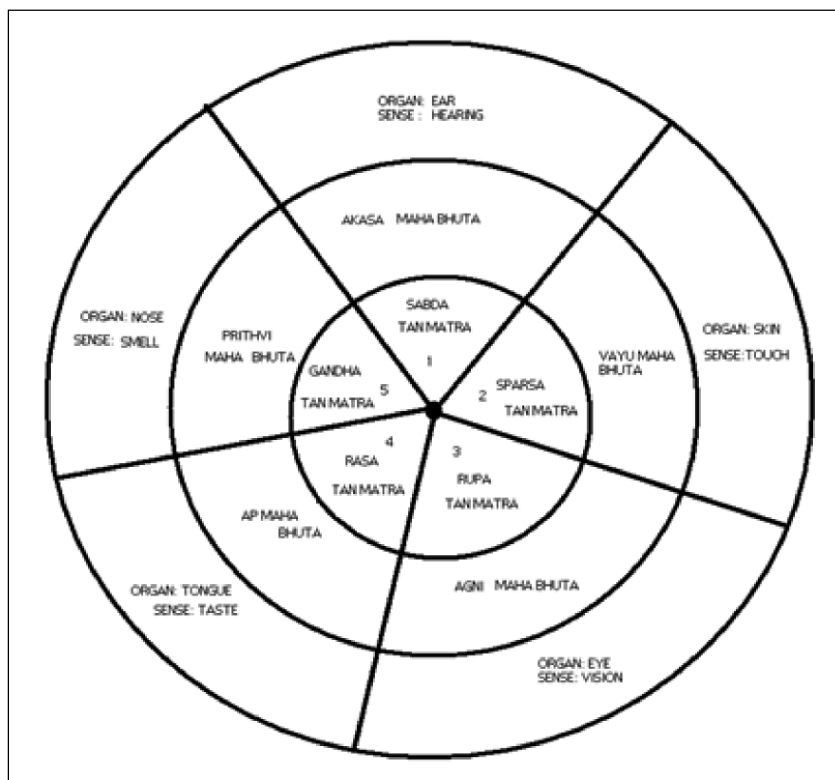


Diagram 2: Pictorial representation of the evolution of the organ and senses from the *Pañca Tanmātra*; this representation is that of the author only and not from any other source. (Shilpa. S, 2011c).

into the respective organ and senses. This delineation is very clearly mentioned in the classical Ayurvedic texts like *Caraka* and *Suśruta Samhitas*. (Sharma, 1981, 2004).

6. Evolution of the *Pañca Mahābhūta* to form *Tridoṣa* and *Triguṇas*

As mentioned before, PMB combine in specific permutations and combinations at the physical level to form the *Tridoṣa* of *Vāta*, *Pitta* and *Kapha*, and they combine with each other at the psychological level to form the *Triguṇas*. Though these *Doṣas* and *Guṇas* are three in number each, there can be dual and triple combination-domination of them. So essentially, these 'typologies' are in effect 7 or 10 for both *Tridoṣas* and *Triguṇas*. (Shilpa & Murthy, 2011a).

1. People with dominant *Vāta* (constitution or) *Prakṛti*.
2. People with dominant *Pitta* *Prakṛti*.
3. People with dominant *Kapha* *Prakṛti*.
4. People with dominant *Vāta-Pitta* *Prakṛti*.
5. People with dominant *Vāta-Kapha* *Prakṛti*.
6. People with dominant *Pitta-Kapha* *Prakṛti*.
7. People with balanced *Doṣas* or with *Vāta-Pitta-Kapha* *Prakṛti*.

Vāta Doṣa (combination of Ether and Air) expresses itself in people and comes across as having personality characteristics that are unpredictable, erratic in all behaviour, fast, restless, creative, and so on. It is easy to see that these are also characteristic properties of Ether and Air.

Similarly, *Pitta Doṣa* (combination of Fire and Water) expresses itself in people and comes across as having personality characteristics that are short tempered, precise, sharp and decisive, amongst others. These being the qualities of fire and water.

Kapha Doṣa (combination of Water and Earth) expresses itself in people and comes across as having personality characteristics that are stable, predictable, slow, dedicated and through in all activities, amongst many others. These are the qualities of water and earth.

It is evident and easy to see that personality characteristics take on the qualities of the PMB and express themselves through the behaviour of the individuals in whom certain PMB and subsequently the *Doṣas* and *Guṇas* are in dominance.

Similarly, we have the following combinations for the *Triguṇas*: (Shilpa & Murthy, 2012a).

1. People with dominant *Sattva Guṇa*.
2. People with dominant *Rajas Guṇa*.
3. People with dominant *Tamas Guṇa*.
4. People with dominant *Sattva-Rajas Guṇa* combination.
5. People with dominant *Sattva-Tamas Guṇa* combination.
6. People with dominant *Rajas-Tamas Guṇa* combination.
7. People with balanced *Guṇas* or with *Sattva-Rajas-Tamas Guṇa* combination.

According to Sushruta, *Sāttvic* people, who have a predominance of *Sattva Guṇa*, have qualities such as: non-violence, desire of sharing goods with others, forgiveness, truthfulness, right conduct, belief in gods, scriptures etc. good amount of knowledge, intelligence, ingenuity, memory, courage, steadfastness and tendency of doing benevolent acts without any expectation in return. (Sharma, P., 2004).

Rājasic people, who have a predominance of *Rajo Guṇa* have qualities such as: more of grief, habit of wandering, cowardice, pride, harsh speech, cruelty, crookedness, selfishness, self-boasting, seeking only pleasure, lust (sexual acts) and anger.

And, *Tāmasic* people, who have a predominance of *Tamo Guṇa*, have qualities such as remorse-less-ness, no belief in gods, scriptures etc., tendency of indulging in sinful acts, restraining the intellect, ignorance (lack of knowledge), bad (cruel) mentality, not inclined to do any activity (due to lack of interest and enthusiasm) and tendency to sleep always." (Shilpa & Murthy, 2012a).

The other important factor that determines an individual's predisposition to disease or wellness, and which are also essential in analyzing *Prakṛti* of individuals, are as follows.

These factors are necessary to map out genetic predominance and epigenetics, history-medical and otherwise that impact the health of an individual and so on.

This entire analysis of *Prakṛti* and its constituents, is also in accordance with the Nature and Nurture principle that forms a continual discussion in Psychology. Trying to understand or delve into just the physical or just the psychological aspect of any disease—when in distress—is incomplete and does not give a true or complete picture of the individual and is a cause of more harm than good.

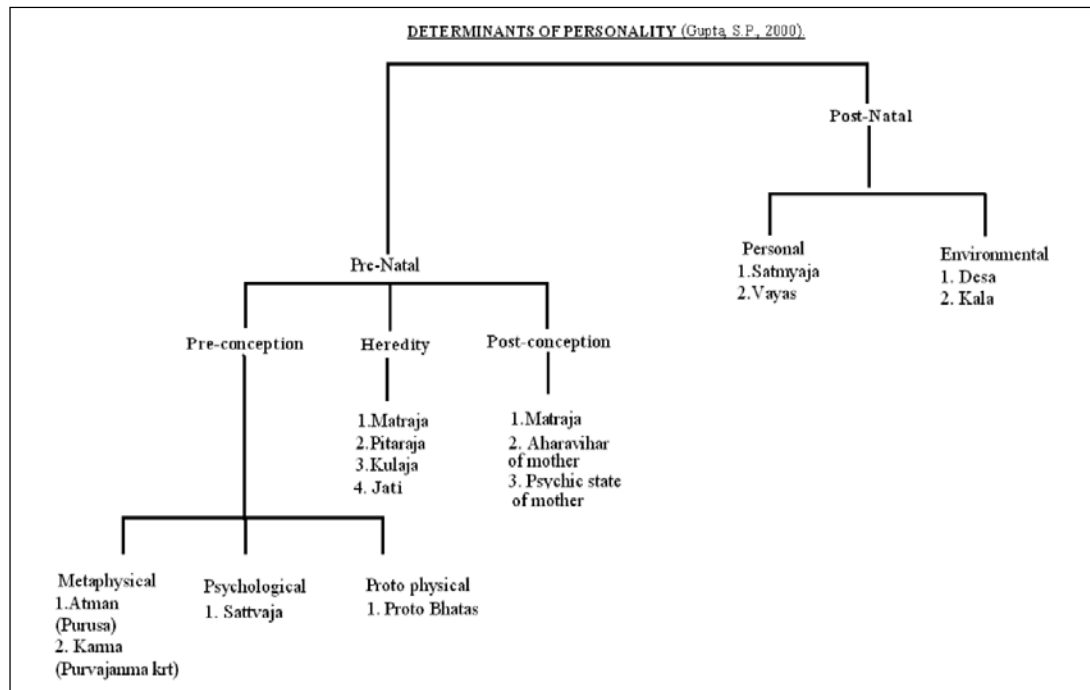


Diagram 3: This diagram is reproduced with permission from Gupta, 2000.

7. 16 Classical Personality types and 189 traits

Caraka and *Sushruta Samhitas*, along with other *Āyurvedic* texts (Sharma, 1981, 2004; Murthy, 1996, 2007) also explain the kinds of personalities that people resemble in their behaviour and ways of thinking. These are the 16 Classical Personality Types, there being 7 sub types under *Sattva* category, 6 under *Rajas* category and 3 under *Tamas* category. They are as follows:

7.1 Seven Types of Sattva Personalities:

1. *Brāhma Sattva*
2. *Ārśa Sattva*
3. *Aindra Sattva*
4. *Yāmya Sattva*
5. *Vārūna Sattva*
6. *Kauberā Sattva*
7. *Gāndharva Sattva*

7.2 Six Types of Rajas Personalities

1. *Āsura Sattva*
2. *Rākṣasa Sattva*
3. *Paiśāca Sattva*
4. *Sarpa Sattva*
5. *Praita Sattva*
6. *Śakuna Sattva*

7.3 Three Types of Tamas Personalities

1. *Pāśava Sattva*
2. *Matsya Sattva*
3. *Vanaspatya Sattva*

Additionally, the present author has also identified 189 traits that cover the gamut of human behaviour. There are 100 *Sattvic* traits, 60 *Rājasic* traits and 29 *Tāmasic* traits. The details of these enumeration have been published, and are not repeated here. (Shilpa & Murthy, 2014).

8. Adopting a unified and integrated understanding of personality

Psychology today is divided over the followers of different theorists who propounded them. The theory of one school of thought is not accepted by the followers of another. Each school of thought have their believers and non-believers and one is more relevant than the other in some countries and some situations compared with the rest. Similarly, adopting one theory and its way of thinking is sometimes incompatible with those of others and there is a clash of ideologies and fields of thought thereby making practicing Psychology an arduous task. In other fields like Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics and so on, there is no such concept of country specific or ideology specific theories, followers and the like. Those interested in Physics, Chemistry or Mathematics follow a singular method of learning, practicing, teaching and problem solving. Unlike them, in Psychology, we have a multitude of theories, proponents, their followers, theories being incompatible with each other and inapplicable in different situations other than for which they came into being.

Considering that people are the same all over the world—with similar way of reacting to pleasure, pain, happiness, grief and so on, we should all be following a theory that is the same. Unfortunately, this unison in psychology is sorely missing.

This paves the way for a more inclusive and elemental understanding of personality, that of *Ayurvedic Prakṛti* assessment. Hence, psychology would be richer indeed, and more pervasive in its understanding of people and behaviours by adopting this well-defined, evidence-based approach to personality delineation and understanding which is practical in its application and has been proven to be successful at it, as evident in the way *Āyurveda* has been treating people for their various diseases and promoting health from many thousand years of unbroken tradition.

Analyzing *Prakṛti* is by no means a simple task. An *Ayurvedic* physician has to bear in mind all these multitude of factors that play their roles in constituting *Prakṛti* of an individual and the ways in which these factors would play a role in the health and wellness both in the physical as well as psychological aspects. The spiritual aspect or the “Consciousness” is the third that plays a major role in the development and behaviour of an individual.

While *Āyurveda* has traditionally been the front-runner for treatment of diseases and more so for prevention of diseases in its initial stages, especially for the physical manifestations, it also lends itself to the treatment of *mānasika vikṛtis*, or mental disturbances and the reasons for its occurrences. Unfortunately, this aspect of *Āyurveda*, for the understanding of mental afflictions has not really been explored by the psychological community thus far. There is a whole treasure trove of literature that is waiting for exploration and which could yield enormous insight into the working of the human mind and its various manifestations along with how we could understand, classify and treat them.

Adopting and importing standardized assessment of *Prakṛti* to study the different *Mānasika Prakṛtis* and to predict disease manifestation along with the kind of mental disturbances each of the *Doṣas* and *Guṇas* typology are prone to and the methods to help individuals overcome them and resolve them successfully, into the domain of psychology, would go a long way in paving the path to better mental health, in today’s world.

In a post-Covid-19 world that we are living in today, it is even more imperative that we understand the workings of the mind of different types of *Prakṛti*, and how it could be treated as stress, anxiety, self-doubt and a host of other mental issues have risen exponentially.

On studying individuals based on the above-mentioned multitude of factors, it is possible to identify areas of difficulty, to see “knots” that need to be un-entangled and areas that need working upon which has large implications for the psychological community, and the entire world as a whole.

Importing the concepts of *Āyurveda*, of the scientific and theoretical underpinnings of understanding *Prakṛti*—more so the psychological aspect has immense value to us as a society. Especially for the branch called “Indian Psychology”, which has current favour across the world would benefit from these concepts to help our clients and patients in our counselling and other daily professional engagements. This would be a richer framework for patients and clients to work in, given the holistic understanding which is its core and unique proposition.

9. Implication for Social Policy and Planning

Analyzing *Prakṛti* is both a science and an art. And, it is time we accept this indigenous knowledge and import it into different sciences for a multi-disciplinary approach to study human mind, body and behaviour that is enriching and holistic. It has long term and large-scale benefits for humanity as a whole. *Āyurveda* with its scientific basis for treatment of diseases through prevention techniques can be implemented on a large scale across India, including the rural and semi-urban areas to great advantage. Enabling *Ayurvedic* physicians to set up and be in charge of Primary Health Care centers across postal codes, and prioritizing prevention of disease proactively would go a long way in ensuring a healthy *Bhrata* thereby reducing the burden on the nation's resources of the country. Similarly equipping our younger generation of psychology students and practitioners in the basis of understanding *Mānasika Prakṛtis* would go a long way in treating disturbances of the mind at the grass-root level and enhance wellbeing amongst our population.

Outside India, *Āyurveda* and more specifically, understanding of *Prakṛti*, is incorporated into daily life as a way for prevention of disease and enhancing immunity and wellness and also forms an important part of Integrative Medical therapies in developed nations. The number of Allopathic medical professionals studying *Āyurveda*, both in India and their home countries, and incorporating its tenets and principles in their daily practice in the West is also on the rise continuously.

Understanding *Prakṛti* to analyze behaviours and mental issues, while treating the physical conditions has multifold implications for psychology. It promises to enhance the field of psychology with its rich interpretations and layers of understanding that would help in resolving conflict and dissonance in different psychological states. Refusing to accept knowledge for sake of ego is detrimental to the individual and in no way affects knowledge. Knowledge is there for its use and application, what we choose—whether to use it or malign it due to our lack of openness to understand and acknowledge it, is our decision alone.

Hence, bringing in standardization to the analysis of *Prakṛti*, establishing scientific

procedures and methodology for the development of protocols to treat both physical as well as mental disturbances and disease progression and prognosis would go a long way in building credibility both within and outside the field and domain of *Āyurveda* and enable higher adaptation of the science, both in academia and scientific circles as well as in the eye of public.

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