

## Elements of Nature and the Organize of Traditions

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### ABSTRACT

According to Ayurveda, the entire universe is made up of five basic elements or building blocks referred to 'pancha maha bhoota siddhanta'. This includes everything in the universe., Quantum physics suggests that the basic fabrics of nature lie at the quantum level. A quantum is defined as the basic unit of matter or energy and is 10-100 million times smaller than the smallest atom.,According to Ayurveda, everything in this universe is made up of combination of these Five Great Elements. Each of these five elements represents not only the physical characteristics but also the subtle ones.

**Key words:** element, bhuta, exceed, nature and culture.

### INTRODUCTION

On the origin of human culture there are two 1) Culturalist 2) Naturalist

Culturalists grant cultural phenomena as autonomous efficient agents of themselves. Naturalists attribute cultural forms to nature<sup>1</sup>.

Various questions can be raised on origin of human and nature and these questions demand explanations from both cultural and astral viewpoints. As science of human my concern and capability are limited to the cultural explanation, quite understandably, away from scientific study of universe.

To this group of questions about nature different answers would follow, depending on the kind of intellectual tradition we refer to. I am here attempting to characterize the indigenous vision of traditional cultures. Within this category there are two different traditions known as the 'oral' and 'textual'. The textual tradition offers a full and systematic analysis of the universe. Reflections

of the oral tradition are more concentrated in practice. The difference is, essentially, philosophical.

### THE SUPERNATURAL ORDER OF NATURE

The Indian textual tradition has produced a unique contribution. A example of this is the theory of Elements. The basic assumption is, that, like the rest of the material world man is made up of Elements which at death disintegrate and dissolve into nature<sup>2</sup>. The Elements have been spiritually identified and metaphysically debated for thousands of years. Traditions differ in respect of both identification and enumeration of Elements. At the most there are nine *tattvas* or Elements: Earth, Water, Fire, Air, Sky, Time, Directions, Mind and Soul<sup>3</sup>. The gross and the subtle aspects of Elements are recognized. At a higher level of realization the distinction between the gross and the subtle gets totally obliterated.

In the tribal oral tradition there is no categorical term that may equal *tattva* or *bhuta*, but its characteristic attitude towards nature is the same.

If we set out to examine the theory of Elements, as discussed in classical texts and described in the oral tradition, we should soon realize that Elements of nature are subject to

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a fivefold order: (1) origination, (2) binding, (3) interlocking, (4) overlapping, and (5) surmounting<sup>4</sup>.

## ORIGINATION

State of nothingness of the initial was not an absolute vacuity. Everything was Water or Cloud, or nothing, nothing at all but two Eggs shining like gold. As the Eggs broke open, from one came the Earth, from the other the Sky. These myths can be parallel in the textual description of *Hiranyagarbha*, the golden germ, and the sacrifice of *Purusa*, the Cosmic Person.

Elements originated in phases. Water, Earth and Sky came first; aquatic animals and bird second; land third; Air or Wind fourth; and finally Fire.

## BINDING

Elements of nature have a binding-ability. Each Element has a form, a location, and a dependent-relation with another Element. Living Forms of nature are self-originating, self-organizing, and self-sustaining. Life is formless, self-existent. As form and life come together, the process of origination begins. Life activates matter that constitutes form, but in itself is not a material substance<sup>5</sup>.

Elements of nature constitute human and other forms, both individually and collectively. Each major organ is said to have its own builder. Head and ears are associated with the Sky; neck and chest with Air; stomach with Fire; and body with Earth<sup>6</sup>.

Elements' binding-ability is expressed in life-processes. As the *Garbha Upanisad* describes<sup>7</sup>

One night after the union in a fertile period, arises a nodule (*kalila*); after seven nights it changes into bubble (*budbud*); in half a month arises the embryo (*pinda*); after one month it becomes solid; after two months the head appears; after three months the formation of the feet is completed; at four months originates the sex, the abdomen and the hips; at five months the back forms; after six months from

the mouth, nose, eyes and ears, and after seven months the individual soul concludes the union. At eight months all the parts are complete.

If tribal description of Elements is transposed on the Upanisadic theory, it would be clear how Elements are associated with intra-uterine formation of major organs. The liquid stage from which the embryo arises is Water; when the embryo becomes solid it is Earth; the appearance of hollow head is Sky; the formation of the moving feet is Wind; the origination of sex and abdomen is associated with heat or Fire<sup>8</sup>.

This sequence of embryonic development roughly corresponds with the origin of the universe.

## INTERLOCKING

Form and life are linked. By entering into a form, the formless life acquires qualitative distinctions. It gives different expressions to different forms or species. Accordingly, it is called by different names. Life gets involved in the threefold process of formation (origination), affirmation (preservation) and negation (dissolution) of Elements. Interlocking of life and form help realize.

Interlocking of Elements is described as Earth and Sky are universal; Fire and Wind are cofactors. Earth and Wind, Water and Fire are negatively linked; Wind is the friend of Fire<sup>9</sup>.

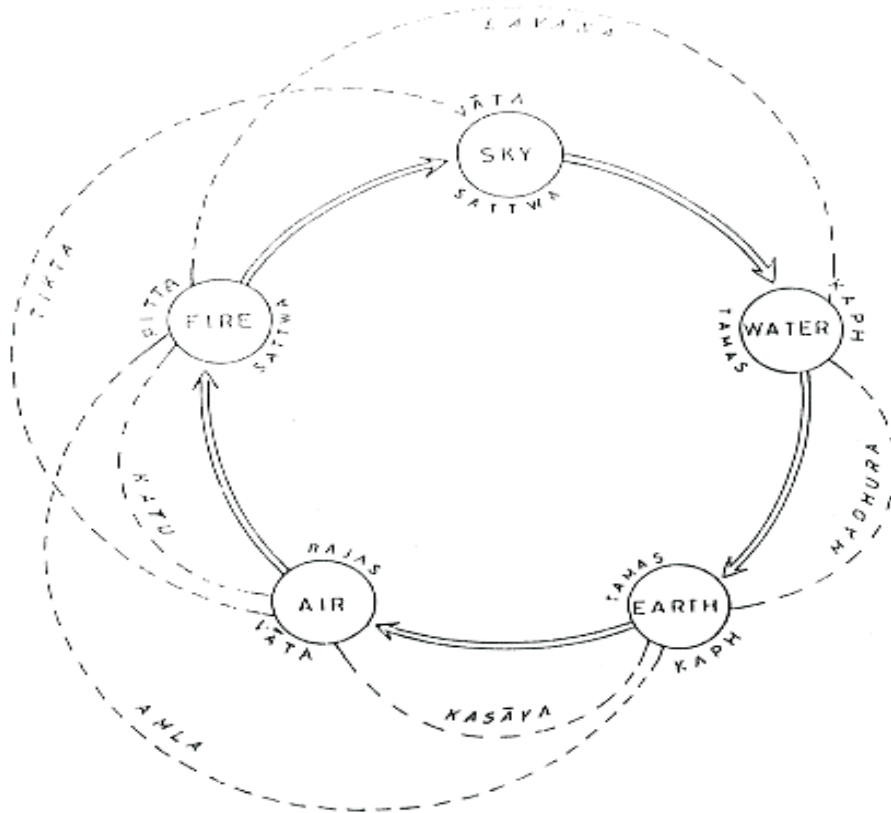
The more complex interlocking is perceived in the textual tradition (*panchadarshi*)

Interlocking Elements (Ayurvedic Tradition) 5 Elements, 3 Gunas, 3 Dosas, 3 Rasas

### Overlapping Elements (fig- 02), Positive --- negative

#### a. Dwayanuka (fig -03)

Interlocking elements (Fig -01)



Overlapping Elements (Fig: 02)

Positive --- negative

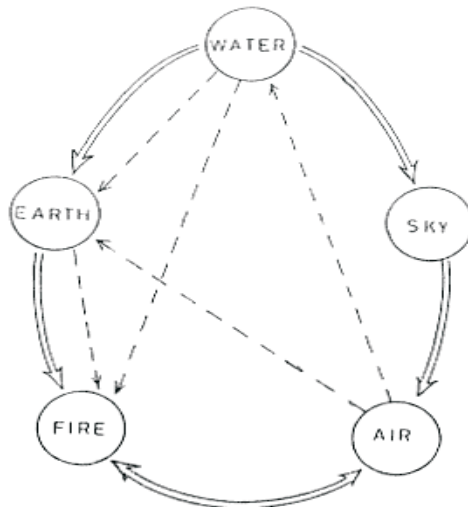
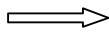
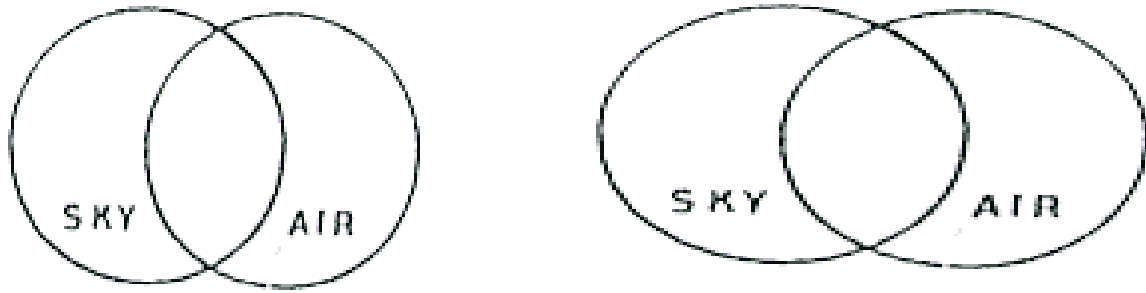


Fig. 10.2. Interlocking Elements (Tribal Tradition)

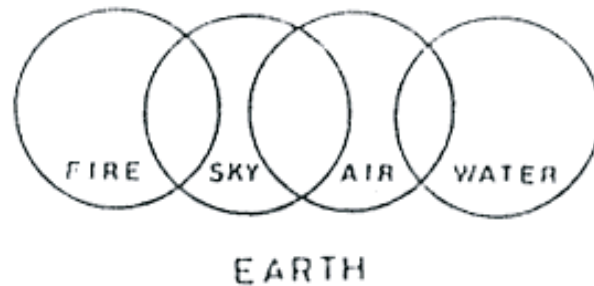
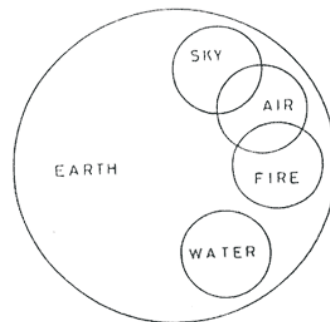
Positive --- Negative

a. Dwayanuka (fig: 03)

b. Trayanuka (fig: 04)



c.Chaturmuka (fig: 05)

**Overlapping elements (fig: 06)**

Gross Earth containing 50% earth and in the residue portion all the remaining four elements<sup>10</sup>.

In the Indian classical text, the five primal Elements are linked with other Elements or aspects of nature such as color, form, sense-organ, physical character, property, functions, etc.

### OVERLAPPING

Elements have both personal (material) and universal (spiritual) attributes. However, not all Elements are spiritually vibrant all the time and at all places.

The world is divided into two halves – the Sky and the Earth. There is a world beyond the Sky and another below the Earth. The Earth is a round-shaped flat surface; the Sky a hollow concave overarching the Earth. The structure of the universe is thus somewhat like a cone, similar to the structure of a tribal leaf-hut.

The five Elements overlap in their formation and so also the world of the matter with the other worlds. Life in this world is repeated in the other world in a similar order. Worlds are communicable in dreams and in trance<sup>13</sup>.

**Table A: The Five Elements as Perceived in Indian Tradition<sup>11</sup> (table-01)**

|     | <i>Five Elements</i>                   | <i>Sky</i>   | <i>Air</i>                                    | <i>Fire</i>  | <i>Water</i>  | <i>Earth</i>                                       |
|-----|--|--|---|--|---|--|
| 1.  | Property                               | sound  | touch   | form   | taste   | smell  |
| 2.  | Physical character                     | absence of resistance                                | movement                                      | heat   | liquidity   | roughness  |
| 3.  | Sensory organ                          | ears   | skin  | eyes   | tongue  | nose   |
| 4.  | Function                               | porousness, distinction                              | lightness activity                            | colour digestion, braveness, brightness, intolerance           | heaviness, coldness, oleaginous, semen              | solidity, heaviness                                |
| 5.  | Psychological property ( <i>Guna</i> ) | <i>sattva</i>  | <i>rajas</i>                                  | <i>sattva</i>  | <i>tamas</i>  | <i>tamas</i>                                       |
| 6.  | <i>Dosa</i>                            | <i>vata</i>  | <i>vata</i>                                   | <i>pitta</i>   | <i>kapha</i>  | <i>kapha</i>                                       |
| 7.  | Color                                  | crystal white  | dark  | red  | white   | yellow   |
| 8.  | Qualities                              | Slimy  | Rough, dry                                    | Rough, dry   | Unctuous  | Rough, dry   |
| 9.  | Nature                                 | Soft   | -   | -  | Soft  | Hard   |
| 10. | <i>Bija-mantra</i>                     | <i>haum</i>  | <i>hyaim</i>                                  | <i>hrum</i>  | <i>hvim</i>   | <i>hlam</i>  |
| 11. | <i>Inherent quality</i>                | -  | cold  | Hot  | Cold  | Not cold neither hot                               |
| 12. | Action                                 | vyavayi  | Vyavayi, vikasi                               | Upward movement  | <i>Downwad movement</i>                             | <i>Downwad movement</i>                            |
| 13. | <i>Natural action</i>                  | <i>Birth</i>   | <i>Collection</i>                             | <i>Growth</i>  | <i>Storage</i>                                      | <i>Transformation</i>                              |
| 14. | Organs                                 | Liver<br>Gall bladder<br>and tendons<br>Ear<br>Satva | Lungs<br>Large intestine<br>,skin and<br>hair | Heart<br>Small intestine and<br>blood vessels<br>Eyes<br>Satva | Kidney<br>Bladder and<br>bones<br><br>Taste<br>Tama | Spleen<br>Stomach and muscles<br><br>Smell<br>Tama |
| 15. | Sensory organs                         |  | Touch   |  |   |  |
| 16. | Mental qualities                       |  | Raja  |  |   |  |

## SURMOUNTING

The state of primordial solidarity was transcended as the Eggs broke open and the universe revealed. The natural order of self-origination was transcended by the origin of the male-female principle. The order of self-organization was transcended by the interlocking of various Elements<sup>14</sup>.

Life transcends the limits of the form. Death transcends all attributes of Elements.

There is no intrinsic disorder in nature – dissolution is an integral aspect of the transcendent order of nature. Transcendence is the order of all orders. It is inviolable<sup>15</sup>.

## THE NATURAL METHOD OF TRADITIONS

Man is not unique even in the possession of knowledge. Primordial knowledge came to

**Table 02: Theory of Tridosha and Seven Types of Properties (Functional Entity of Human Body)<sup>12</sup>**

| Sl. No | Dosha | Guna             | Effective organ in body |
|--------|-------|------------------|-------------------------|
| 1      | Vata  | Rooksha & khara  | Asthi                   |
|        |       | sheeta           | Rasa & shukra           |
|        |       | Vishada          | Mamsa                   |
|        |       | Chala            | Rakta                   |
|        |       | Sookshma         | Shukra                  |
|        |       | Laghu            | Meda                    |
| 2      | Pitta | Sneha            | Majja & mamsa           |
|        |       | Amla             | Meda                    |
|        |       | Teekshna & ushna | Rakta                   |
|        |       | Sara & drava     | Rasa & shukra           |
|        |       | Katu             | Asthi                   |
| 3      | Kapha | Guru & madhura   | Mamsa                   |
|        |       | Sheeta           | Rasa & shukra           |
|        |       | Snigdha          | Majja, mamsa & rakta    |
|        |       | Sthira           | Asthi                   |
|        |       | Picchila         | Shukra                  |
|        |       | Mrudu            | Meda                    |

him from birds and animals. The priests of all creatures were born, ahead of human beings. Man is not the creator of knowledge. Philosophical Intelligence is the self-existent source of all knowledge<sup>16</sup>.

Man lives on the Earth in the company of animals and spirits. Natural Elements are under the control of spirits. The spirits are everywhere and in all things and beings. They are the invisible controller of human behavior.

Not a single event takes place without any cause. As there is cause so there is an effect or *vice-versa*. Cause can be found, but not under ordinary condition.

Ritual helps man experience the ecological rhythm of his life.

As ecological being, man is fully conscious of his physical limitations. He is also aware of his innate equipment for safeguarding against the adversaries.

### THE MAKING OF PERSONS

Elements of nature have a dependable role in the making of persons.

Biologically man is made up of the Earth, Water, Fire, etc. Pigmentation, formation and function of the body tissues, sense-organs, etc. are associated with the Five Elements. Psychologically man is conditioned by the attributes (*guna*) of Elements.

Human personality type is determined by biological time, beginning from the birth<sup>17</sup>.

The Man of matter (Elements) moves upward through a ritual process of socialization at different stages in life.

In Indian astrology there is a belief that impurity (*mala*) clings to birth and the removal of it is the primary concern of man. The ritual process by which the body is cleansed is called *samskara*<sup>18</sup>. From securing the conception to the last rite of cremation a number of *samskara* rites are required to be observed. Only then one becomes a full member of the society and a cultural being. Purification of body is obligatory for all kinds of worship and ceremonies. One such ritual is called *bhutasuddhi*<sup>19</sup>, the purification of the different layers of elements in the body (*bhutasarira*) of the worshipper.

Satisfaction of the body needs is a critical factor in the survival of man. The mind responds to the physical needs – it creates

the urge to satisfy these needs. The spirit, which transcends both the body and the mind allows satisfaction of the needs.

All traditional societies are structured on a fourfold control system that orders human life, his subsistence, distinctions and desires. Life is ordered into four successive stages (*asrama*) from learning and performing to gradual indifference and final withdrawal. Human desires are fourfold: the desire to uphold the natural moral order (*dharma*), desire connected with wealth and power (*artha*), the desire for pleasure or procreation (*kama*), the desire for freedom from all desires (*moksa*). Although seemingly opposed in character, these primal desires stand in an organic and interactive relationship to one another. This fourfold ordering of life is called *purusartha*, that is, the making of a cultural person (*sanskritika purusa*).

Man can neither create nor destroy nature. He is a creator of culture only in a limited sense, because cultural forms are prone to the fivefold order of transcendence. This he often does for spiritual gains and emotional satisfaction. The urge for transcendence is attributed to the complex structuring of the sense-organs, and all that is known as *tattoa*.

### THE FUNDAMENTAL (TRADITIONAL) VISION

Theory of nature and culture is nullified by the traditional vision.

Living matter exists only by the order of the transcendent life, the one which is formless, invisible, but knowable through its effect. Nature constitutes a set of self-originating, self-organizing and self-sustaining forms. Life renders matter the binding abilities, interlocking powers, overlapping characters, and a transcendent state. The supreme order of nature is that (*Prakrti*) it is nature's nature.

Elements of nature, in their living state, may appropriately be described as process. They are set into a technical order. Like natural forms, the forms of culture are also subject to the fivefold order: origination, binding, interlocking, overlapping and surmounting.

Man of matter is culturally processed (*purusartha*). He is transformed into a moral person (*naitika purusa*). The gross body undergoes through a transcendental superpsychic process of cultivation (*samskara*) and purification (*bhutasuddhi*). Man discovers major points of power in his subtle body that functions as an instrument (*yantra*) for the inner meditative experience. He invokes the spirit or deity to possess his body. In that state of possession, or meditation, the cultural man is transformed into a cosmic person (*vishvarupa*)<sup>20</sup>.

The concept of *purusa* is central to the Indian thought and culture. Its echoes are obvious both in cosmology and in sociology.

To understand and deepen the traditional vision of man, nature and culture, it is important to clear up the distinctions between the oral and the textual perceptions.

As indicated before, in the oral tradition the ecological man looks upon nature as the self-existing reality of which he is an inseparable part at all levels. This view of nature differs from the philosophers', or physicists' cosmology in which man takes a characteristic attitude towards nature. Here man is the knower and nature is the object to be known. In the oral tradition experience and expressions are kept together. In other words, there is no gap between knowledge and existence. The textual tradition, on the other hand, is homocentric in the sense that all its paradigms come, essentially, from within man, crystallized in such concepts as *pancabhuta*, *pancakosa*, *purusa* and so on. Nevertheless, both these traditions are grounded in the same cosmology and shared faith in man's ontological communion with nature<sup>21</sup>.

Man is related to nature, the elements and animal and plant life. The environment in which he lives is not an alien environment. He always considers it his own, where he is like all other breathing, but endowed with the special faculty of self-reflection and speech, thus of *vak*. Indeed, man is constantly seen as an embodiment of the elements and forces of nature and in relationship to animal and plant life. This gives the world a different character from what is implied in the modern idea of

progressive evolution. Man is not the best because he overpowers and conquers nature and is thus the fittest to survive.

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Points to remember (not more than 5 points):

1. The basic assumption is, that, like the rest of the material world man is made up of Elements which at death disintegrate and dissolve into nature.

2. Elements' binding-ability is expressed in life-processes.

3. Man lives on the Earth in the company of animals and spirits. Natural Elements are under the control of spirits.

4. Like natural forms, the forms of culture are also subject to the fivefold order: origination, binding, interlocking, overlapping and surmounting.

5. Man is related to nature, the elements and animal and plant life

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