

## PANCHAMAHABHUTA SIDDHANT - FIRST EVER USE OF 'FIRST PRINCIPLES THINKING APPROACH' IN HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

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A few days ago, I just went through a thought-provoking interview of world's richest man 'Elon Musk' (the Billionaire CEO of SpaceX and Tesla Company), talking about the use of 'first principles thinking' in his professional life. Over two thousand years ago, Aristotle defined first principles as "the first basis from which a thing is known."

In theory, first principles thinking requires you to dig deeper and deeper until you are left with only the foundational truths of a situation. In other words, 'a first principle is a basic assumption that cannot be deduced any further.

Elon explained, to achieve the success you don't have to simplify every problem down to the atomic level to get the benefits of first principles thinking. You just need to go one or two levels deeper than most people.

He further explained that first principle thinking means "boiling problems down to their most fundamental truths" and then reasoning up from there. Through most of our life, we get through life by reasoning by analogy, which essentially means copying what other people do with slight variations.

In his own words, Elon said, let's think about Rocket. What is a rocket made of? Aerospace-grade aluminum alloys, plus some titanium, copper, and carbon fibre. Then he asked himself, what is the value of those materials on the commodity market? It turned out that the materials cost of a rocket was around two per cent of the typical price."

Instead of buying a finished rocket for tens of millions, Musk decided to create his own company, purchase the raw materials for cheap, and build the rock-

ets himself. With this motto, SpaceX Company was established. Within a few years, SpaceX had cut the price of launching a rocket by nearly 10x while still making a profit.<sup>1</sup>

Here are 3 simple steps recommended by Elon Musk himself to use first principle.<sup>2</sup>

STEP 1: Identify and define your current assumptions

STEP 2: Breakdown the problem into its fundamental principles.

STEP 3: Create new solutions from scratch

### **The Challenge of Reasoning from First Principle-**

Though first principles thinking is easy to describe, it is quite difficult to practice the same. One of the primary obstacles to first principles thinking is our tendency to optimize 'form' rather than 'function'. The story of the suitcase with wheel provides a perfect example.

In the history of mankind, there were two important inventions, the wheel and the bag and yet, for thousands of years, nobody thought to combine the bag and the wheel. In 1970 Mr Sadow had his eureka moment of combining these two inventions and making rolling suitcase as he pulled two heavy suitcases through an airport while returning from a family vacation.<sup>3</sup>

### **Panchamahabhuta Siddhant of Ayurveda-**

The theory of *Panchamahabhuta* is one of the most important and logically described concepts in *Ayurvedic* compendia. As per this concept the food, the planets, every living and non-living thing in this universe is made up of *Panchmahabhuta*. Our body is a very minute image of the universe. Even *Tridoshas* (i.e., *Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha*) are also comprised of *Panchmahabhuta*.

The only thing which separates the living and non-living things is the soul. Our body is composed of *Panchmahabhutas* and the food which we consume is also *Panchabhautic*. When food undergoes digestion

by the action of *Jatharagni* (digestive power), *Parthiv* (*Prithvi Mahabhuta*) properties of food nurtures the *Parthiv* part of the body. In this manner corresponding properties of *Panchmahabhutas* give nutrition to the corresponding part of the body (i.e., corresponding *Mahabhuta*) as in accordance with *Samanya Vishesh Siddhanta*.

*Ayurvedic* treatment methods rely on the concept of *Panchamahabhutas* i.e. *Aakash*, *Vayu*, *Agni*, *Jala*, *Prithvi*.<sup>4</sup> The *Panchmahabhuta* revolves around the normal functioning of the body (physiological), the occurrence of disease (pathological) and action of the drug in various part of the body (pharmacokinetics).<sup>5</sup>

Just like in case of first principles thinking as Elon musk said, we dig deeper to the base of the problem, here also based on thorough knowledge and understanding of *Panchmahabhuta Siddhanta* one can take an account of the causative factors of imbalance of *Doshas* in terms of *Panchamahabhuta* and thereby discover the proper approach for the treatment.

### **Clinical application of Panchamahabhuta Siddhanta-**

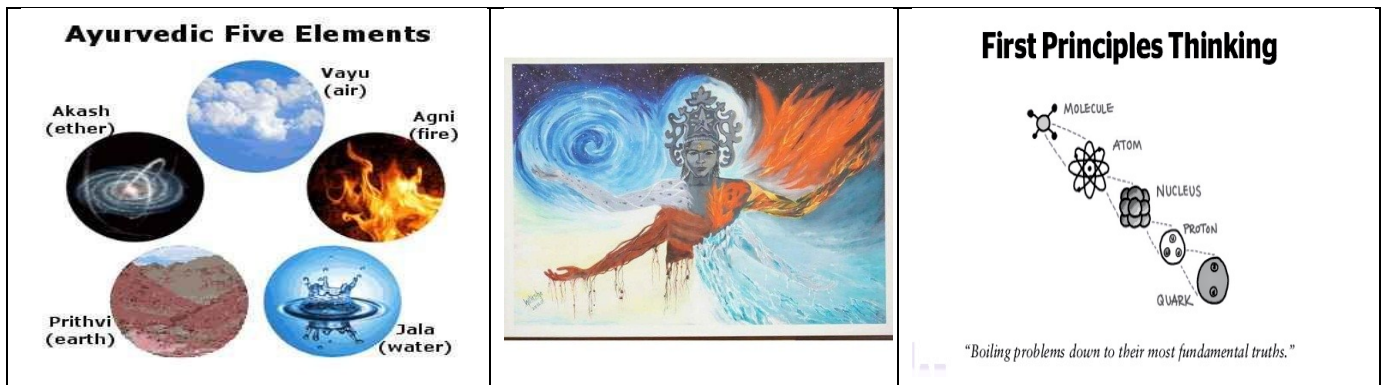
As per *Ayurveda*, all the available *Dravyas* can be used as medicine but it requires proper reasoning (*Yukti*). It is possible only if physician have a deep understanding of concept of *Panchamahabhutas* and *Pancha Mahabhutagni*.

Excessive or deficit functioning of *Bhutagni's* makes them inefficient to digest the useful components from the food and nourish the body tissue accordingly. In *Ayurveda* the treatment and diet are planned in such a way that it will correct the *Bhutagni's* function of digestion along with proper nourishment of each *Mahabhuta*. Overall aim is to maintain homeostasis at subtle level. For example, *Asthi Dhatu* is predominantly made up of *Prithvi* and *Vayu Mahabhuta*. When the *Prithvi Mahabhuta* undergoes imbalance, it leads to bone related diseases like osteoarthritis etc. Here *Ayurvedic* treatment principles are also based on correcting the imbalances of *Prithvi* and *Vayu Mahabhuta*.<sup>6</sup>

As per our reasoning, this *Ayurvedic* concept of *Panchamahabhuta Siddhanta* and its application for the treatment of diseases; is the first-ever rational use of 'first principles thinking' in the healthcare system which is described near about 5000 years ago in India.

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