

The Resilient Self: Exploring Individual Responses to Stress through the Wisdom of Prakriti

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Abstract

Background:

Stress is a universal human experience, but individuals may respond differently to the same physical, psychological or emotional challenge. Differences in sleep, appetite, energy, concentration and emotional responses highlight the importance of understanding individual variability in stress adaptation. Ayurveda recognizes such individuality through the concept of *Prakriti*, based on the constitutional characteristics of *Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha*.

Objective:

To explore the relevance of *Prakriti* in understanding individual variations in stress response, adaptation and recovery, and to examine its possible relevance to contemporary physiological and preventive healthcare perspectives.

Methods/Discussion:

The article presents a conceptual narrative integrating Ayurvedic principles of

Prakriti, *Agni*, *Bala* and *Ojas* with contemporary understanding of stress physiology. Modern physiology explains stress adaptation through interactions among neural, endocrine, metabolic, psychological and environmental factors. Contemporary research has also explored possible biological correlates of *Prakriti*. These findings provide opportunities for scientific investigation, while emphasizing that Ayurvedic concepts should not be reduced to individual genes or single modern biomarkers.

Conclusion:

Prakriti provides a framework for recognizing constitutional individuality and may offer useful directions for understanding differences in stress response and recovery. Integrating classical Ayurvedic perspectives with appropriate contemporary research methods may support a more individualized and preventive approach to health while

preserving the original meaning of Ayurvedic concepts.

Keywords: *Ayurveda, Prakriti, Kriya Sharir*, stress, resilience, adaptation, recovery, individualized healthcare.

Introduction

Two people may experience the same stressful situation but respond in very different ways. For example, during an examination, one student may remain calm and focused, whereas another may develop restlessness, poor concentration, disturbed sleep or changes in appetite. The external stressor is similar, but the physiological and behavioural response is not.

Modern physiology describes stress as a coordinated response involving neural, endocrine and metabolic systems. Psychological and environmental factors also influence how an individual responds to stress. Short-term stress may support adaptation, whereas prolonged stress without adequate recovery can adversely affect health.¹

The recognition of individual variation, however, is not new. Ayurveda describes constitutional individuality through *Prakriti*, with *Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha* forming the fundamental *Dosha*-based framework of constitutional assessment.²

From the perspective of *Kriya Sharir*, this raises an important question: Could constitutional individuality help us understand why people respond differently to similar physiological or psychological challenges?

Rather than assuming that one *Prakriti* is better or more resilient than another, the concept can be explored as a framework for understanding individual patterns of functioning, adaptation and recovery.

Methods

This article follows a narrative, concept-based review approach. Classical Ayurvedic descriptions of *Prakriti*, *Agni*, *Bala* and *Ojas* were considered alongside contemporary literature concerning stress physiology, biological rhythms and research investigating possible biological correlates of *Prakriti*.

The discussion was developed around three questions:

1. How does modern physiology explain individual responses to stress?
2. How does Ayurveda describe constitutional individuality?
3. Can the two perspectives be brought together without equating Ayurvedic concepts with single modern biomarkers?

Classical references were drawn from *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita* and *Ashtanga Hridaya*. Contemporary evidence included studies examining relationships between *Prakriti* and genetic or pharmacogenomic characteristics. The available evidence was interpreted cautiously, with emphasis on the difference between association and scientific validation.

Results

1 *Prakriti*: The Individual Behind the Physiology

Ayurveda does not view every individual as physiologically identical. *Deha Prakriti* describes constitutional characteristics and functional tendencies in relation to *Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha*.

Importantly, *Prakriti* should not be understood merely as a physical “body type”. It represents a broader constitutional framework through which individual

characteristics and tendencies are understood.

This idea has a meaningful connection with the modern movement towards personalized healthcare. Contemporary research has explored whether different *Prakriti* classifications may be associated with measurable biological characteristics.

For example, an early study investigated the relationship between *Prakriti* classification and HLA gene polymorphisms.³ Subsequent research examined possible associations between *Prakriti* and CYP2C19 polymorphism, particularly in relation to variability in drug metabolism.⁴ A later genome-wide study also investigated genetic variation among selected *Prakriti* groups.

These findings are scientifically interesting because they suggest that constitutional classifications can be investigated using modern research methods. However, they do not establish that *Prakriti* is determined by a single gene or can be completely explained by genetics.

2 Stress and the Physiology of Adaptation

The human body is continuously adjusting to internal and external demands. During exercise, heart rate and respiration increase; after the activity ends, these parameters gradually return towards resting levels. Similarly, eating, sleeping, physical activity and emotional experiences produce changes in physiological function.

Modern physiology describes *homeostasis* as the maintenance of internal stability.⁵ However, health is not simply a state of remaining unchanged. A healthy organism must also be capable of responding appropriately to challenges and returning towards equilibrium.

Thus, resilience can be viewed as a dynamic process:

Challenge → Response → Adaptation → Recovery

Individuals may differ in the intensity of their response and in the time required for recovery. Such variation is influenced by multiple factors, including biological constitution, previous experiences, lifestyle, sleep, environment and psychological state.

Therefore, differences in stress response should not automatically be interpreted as evidence that one *Prakriti* is superior to another.

3 Recovery and the Rhythm of Life

Persistent stress may influence several aspects of daily functioning, including sleep, appetite, digestion, concentration and energy. Recovery therefore becomes an important component of maintaining physiological balance.

Modern physiology recognizes biological rhythms that influence sleep-wake patterns and metabolic functions.⁶ Ayurveda has traditionally emphasized regular daily routines through *Dinacharya* and appropriate adaptation to environmental and seasonal changes.⁷

Although these frameworks arise from different conceptual systems, both draw attention to an important practical principle: the timing and regularity of daily activities can influence health.

Adequate sleep, appropriate nutrition, physical activity and periods of rest provide the body with opportunities to respond and recover.

4 Agni, Bala and Ojas: Ayurvedic Dimensions of Resilience

Agni occupies a central position in Ayurvedic physiology and is associated

with digestion and transformation.⁸ Modern physiology describes digestion, absorption and metabolism through different biological mechanisms.⁹ These concepts should therefore not be treated as identical, but *Agni* can provide a useful Ayurvedic framework for discussing nourishment and physiological functioning.

Similarly, *Bala* is commonly translated as strength, but its classical significance extends beyond muscular power. It relates to the strength and functional capacity of the individual.

Ojas is another important Ayurvedic concept associated with vitality and the maintenance of health.

Rather than forcing these concepts into one-to-one modern equivalents, they may be used to generate research questions.

For example:

Prakriti → individual constitution

Agni → functional processing and nourishment

Bala → capacity and strength

Ojas → vitality and maintenance of health

Together, these concepts encourage a broader question: How does an individual function, respond to challenge and recover?

Discussion

➤ From Classical Individuality to Scientific Inquiry

One of the important strengths of *Prakriti* is that it begins with the recognition of individuality. Modern personalized healthcare similarly acknowledges that biological responses can vary between individuals.

Research involving *Prakriti* and genetic or pharmacogenomic characteristics provides an example of how an Ayurvedic concept can generate questions for contemporary

investigation. However, these studies should not be interpreted as complete scientific validation of the entire concept of *Prakriti*.

The available evidence also highlights an important methodological issue. Human physiology is influenced by the interaction of genetics, environment, lifestyle, behaviour and other factors. Therefore, identifying a single biomarker and declaring it to be the biological equivalent of *Prakriti* would oversimplify a complex constitutional concept.

A more appropriate research question would be:

“Are constitutional characteristics associated with reproducible physiological patterns?”

This question preserves the broader meaning of *Prakriti* while allowing it to be investigated scientifically.

➤ The Role of *Kriya Sharir*

Kriya Sharir provides a natural interface between classical Ayurvedic physiology and contemporary physiological science.

Future research may examine whether constitutionally assessed individuals demonstrate differences in measurable parameters related to:

- stress response,
- sleep and circadian patterns,
- autonomic activity,
- metabolism,
- exercise response,
- recovery after physical or psychological stress.

Such studies require standardized *Prakriti* assessment, clearly defined physiological outcomes, appropriate sample sizes and reproducible methodology.

The objective should not simply be to “prove” an ancient concept. Instead, research should attempt to understand the concept sufficiently to formulate meaningful and testable scientific questions.

➤ **Towards Individualized Preventive Healthcare**

Modern lifestyles frequently involve prolonged screen exposure, irregular meals, sedentary behaviour, psychological pressure and disturbed sleep. These factors can interfere with adequate recovery.

Preventive healthcare therefore needs to look beyond the question, “What disease does this person have?”

It may also ask:

- How does this individual normally function?
- How does the person respond to stress?
- What factors disturb recovery?
- Which lifestyle practices support balance?
- How can health be maintained before disease develops?

Prakriti offers one possible starting point for this individualized perspective.

At the same time, constitutional individuality should not replace universal principles of healthy living. Adequate sleep, nutritious food, physical activity and mental wellbeing remain important for everyone. The possible contribution of *Prakriti* lies in considering how these principles may be appropriately adapted according to individual constitution, age, occupation, environment and circumstances.

➤ **Ayurveda and Modern Science: A Dialogue, Not a Competition**

The future of Ayurveda does not require classical knowledge and modern science to compete with each other.

Classical concepts can provide research questions.

Modern physiology can provide measurement tools.

Technology can help identify complex biological patterns.

Scientific evidence can guide responsible interpretation and application.

This approach allows Ayurveda to remain connected to its classical foundations while participating meaningfully in contemporary health research.

Conclusion

The same stressor does not necessarily produce the same response in every individual. Modern physiology demonstrates that stress adaptation involves complex interactions between biological, psychological, behavioural and environmental factors. Ayurveda, through the concept of *Prakriti*, places individuality at the centre of understanding the human being.

Research in Ayurgenomics has begun exploring whether this constitutional individuality may have measurable biological correlates. However, current findings should be interpreted carefully and should not be presented as complete scientific validation of *Prakriti*.

The greater value of *Prakriti* may lie in the question it encourages us to ask:

What makes each individual physiologically unique?

Prakriti provides a constitutional perspective, while *Agni*, *Bala* and *Ojas* offer additional dimensions for considering functioning, capacity and vitality. Modern

physiology provides tools for studying adaptation and recovery.

Resilience does not mean never experiencing stress. It is the ability to respond, adapt and recover.

In a changing world, the enduring message of *Prakriti* is therefore simple:

Understand the individual before trying to understand the disease.

Different bodies. Different responses. One shared goal—health.

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