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## STRESS MANAGEMENT – THE INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

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**Abstract:** *The spiritual dimension is not something supernatural, but only super-sensory and super-intellectual. Spirituality contributes to mental health. It contributes to discipline of mind and body, positive attitude to physical work, dignity of labour and development of a work culture. It also promotes a positive attitude to inter-personal role conflict and other stresses of life. It cultivates a desire for introspection and self-analysis. In the present article a discussion is being made to remove stress under spiritual dimensions.*

**Index Terms -** Stress, Distress, Depression, Acupuncture, Psychotherapy.

The origin of the concept of stress predates antiquity. Even prehistoric man must have recognised a common element in the loss of vigour and a sense of exhaustion that overcame him after various kinds of strenuous exertion. However, empirical research could not begin until Hans Selye wrote his first article on Stress in 1956.

The popularity of the stress concept has dwindled in the physiological field, where it first started and the use of stress terminology continues to flourish in the psychological and social fields, and during the past 15 years the term "stress" has come into wide use in relation to work organisations. Stress management refers to the wide spectrum of techniques and psychotherapies aimed at controlling a person's levels of stress, especially chronic stress, usually for the purpose of improving everyday functioning.

In this context, the term 'stress' refers only to a stress with significant negative consequences, or distress in the terminology advocated by Hans Selye, rather than what he calls eustress, a stress whose consequences are helpful or otherwise positive.

Stress produces numerous symptoms which vary according to persons, situations, and severity. These can include physical health decline as well as depression. The process of stress management is named as one of the keys to a happy and successful life in modern society. Although life provides numerous demands that can prove difficult to handle, stress management provides a number of ways to manage anxiety and maintain overall well-being.

Despite stress often being thought of as a subjective experience, levels of stress are readily measurable using various physiological tests, similar to those used in polygraphs.

Many practical stress management techniques are available, some for use by health practitioners and others for self help, which may help an individual to reduce stress, provide positive feelings of being in control of one's life and promote general well-being.

The effectiveness of the different stress management techniques can be difficult to assess, as few of them have received significant attention from researchers. Consequently, the amount and quality of evidence for the various techniques varies widely. Some are accepted as effective treatments for use in psychotherapy, whilst others with less evidence favouring them are considered alternative therapies. Many professional organisations exist to promote and provide training in conventional or alternative therapies.

There are several models of stress management, each with distinctive explanations of mechanisms for controlling stress. Much more research is necessary to provide a better understanding of which mechanisms actually operate and are effective in practice.

Frankly speaking, the concept of stress in modern science is not easily found in the traditional texts of Indian culture and tradition such as "Chark Samhita", "Patanjali's Yoga sutras" and "Bhagwad Gita". However, there are a number of concepts, developed ancient Indian scholars which relate to or appear similar to the phenomenon of stress. Some of these, for example are "Dukha" (pain, misery or suffering), "Klesa" (afflictions), "Kama" or "Trisna" (desires), "atman" and "ahamkara" (self and ego), "adhi" (mental aberrations) and "parjnaparadha" (failure or lapse of consciousness). It is interesting to note that body-mind relationship, characteristic of modern stress studies, is emphasised in the ayurvedic (Indian) system of medicine.

Palsane, Bhavsar, Goswami and Evans (1986) noted that the Indian tradition is characterised by a holistic approach to human phenomena. Behaviour is interpreted in terms of a totality of individual's life styles and total body-mind relationship. Mind-body level of analysis in the Indian tradition is treated as less significant than analysis at a still higher transpersonal level of self, "atman" or soul, which in turn is equaled with "Brahman" the ultimate reality.

Rao (1983) very succinctly spoke about the origin of stress in the Indian thought. Tracing it back to "sankhya" and "yoga" systems, he points out that there are two Sanskrit words "klesa" and "dukha" which approximate stress. The Word "klesa" has its origin in the root "khis" which means to torment, cause pain or "to afflict". The "klesas" are not mental processes but are a set of "hindering load" on our mental process; they produce agitations which act as restrictions or hindrances. The "samkhya yoga"

explains that the fundamental non-cognition which leads to phenomenological stress is “*avidya*”. This “*avidya*” leads to “*asmita*” (self appraisal), “*raga*” (object appraisal), “*dvesha*” (threat appraisal) and “*athinivesa*” (coping orientation), Faulty evaluation in either or all of the three appraisals, namely, those concerning the self, object and the threat, can cause stress and torment.

The samkhya system postulates that the feeling of “*dukkh*” or stress is experienced by the individual in the course of his interaction with the world around him. There are three types of stresses which samkhya speaks of: personal (*adhyatmik*), situational (*adhibhotik*) and environmental (*adhidevik*).

The personal stresses can again be of two types, namely, physiological and psychological (or mental). The physiological stresses are born out of imbalances between the three fundamental physiologic constituents, namely, “*vata*”, “*pitta*”, and “*kaph*”. The psychological stresses are caused by emotional states of lust, hatred, greed, fear, jealousy and depression. The situational stresses are usually caused by unwholesome interpersonal transactions which might include conflicts, competitiveness, aggression etc. The third type of stresses namely the environmental stress are occasioned by natural calamities, extremes of temperatures, storms etc.

The “*abhinivesa*” indicates the commencement of coping behaviours by arranging the behaviours in a proper response sequence. Looking back at the concepts of “*asmita*”, “*raga*” and “*dvesha*”, we find that they clearly indicate the ‘increasing relevance of transactional cognitive processes to life situations’ and also the increasing role of ‘energy-dynamics’.

The “*klesa*” as stress has been defined operates at four different modes. The first is “*prosupta*” or dormant. Given the right type of conditions, any mental process can become a stressor. The analogy is given of a seed which can flower into a tree provided the facilitating conditions are present. The second is “*tonu*” or tenuous denoting comparatively weak stressors which are held in check by more powerful stressors. They are present but without sufficient intensity and urgency. The third stressors are “*vichchinna*” or intercepted; these lack continuities due to conflict with competing responses. Their demand character is high but they alternate between the levels of ‘high operation’ to ‘dormant’.

Naturally, they surrender their stressor value when in dormant stage. The fourth mode is “*udara*” or operative stressors. These are potent stress responses which have found full expression in clearly observable behavioural modes. They have overcome the weaknesses of the first three modes.

The above given model proposed in the “Yoga-Sutra” is a comprehensive one incorporating cognitive structuring affective or emotional stages and adaptive reactions. It also presents the concept of “*kriya-yoga*” which is aimed at reducing the ‘number and intensity of the stressors’ and to facilitate related conservation of mental energy devoid of tension which is designated as “*Samadhi-bhavana*”.

It is evident from the above description that like western researchers, Indian scholars also differently approached the problem of stress. They viewed this phenomenon from various angles ranging from stimulus oriented to response and psychodynamic point of view. The system of yoga is analytical and not only helps the individuals in understanding their own stresses but also leads them to the roots of these stresses. There are subtle variations in the intensity with which different stressors operate and it is not unlikely that the powerful stressors become less or even dormant after a period of time whereas the less powerful ones may vanish or return with greater vigour.

### Stress and Coping

Individuals and the organisations cannot remain in continuous state of tension. Even if a deliberate and conscious strategy is not utilised to deal with stress, some strategy is adopted, for example, the strategy maybe to leave the conflicts and stress to take care of them. This, we call, avoidance coping strategy.

The word coping has mainly two meanings predominant in the literature. The term coping has been used to denote the way of dealing with stress or the effort to in aster conditions of harm, threat, or challenge when a routine or automatic response is not readily available (Lazarus, 1974).

There are basically two categories of coping strategies (i) Drug strategies (ii) Non-Drug Strategies.

### Indian Indigenous Drugs and Stress

A number of Indian indigenous drugs are reported to have curative effect on stress caused, psychological as well as psychosomatic and hormonal disorder. For example, classes of Ayurvedic drugs known as “*Medhya Rasayanas*” are popularly used as nervine tonics and as remedies for the treatment of mental disorders. Similarly, “*Amalaki Rasayanas*” and “*Amalk Rasayana*” are reported to be best Indian indigenous drugs for treatment of peptic ulcer and traumatic stress.

The non-drug methods of coping are more advantageous and safer. We will be discussing a few of the non-drug methods like walking, exercise, acupuncture, yoga etc.

### Acupuncture as a Relaxation Response

Stress leads to psychosomatic disorders, since emotional states are often expressed in bodily reaction.

The common manifestations observed due to distress are depression, anxiety, cardio-vascular accidents, muscular aches and pains, insomnia, gastrointestinal ulcers, sexual dysfunction, allergies and mental derangements.

- i) Acupuncture does help in transquilisation and psychic elation and allows one to relax. Acupuncture, besides being drugless, safe, simple, economical and yet effective therapy with hardly any side effects, has demonstrated by its clinical success, a definite place in coping with stress.
- ii) **Exercise:** Physical exercise is necessary in order to keep the body healthy, physically and mentally, and is the best antidote for stress. It provides recreation and mental relaxation.

Emotional strength is a major by-product of regular exercise, self-confidence naturally develops. Exercise eases nervous tension and anxiety by providing outlet for pent-up feelings of aggression and hostility. One of the best exercises is walking.

- iii) **Walking:** Today after some 2000 years, modern medical researchers are demonstrating that Hippocrates, "the father of medicine", was right..... Walking is man's best “medicine”! Walking is the most “efficient” form of exercise ... and the only one you can safely follow all the years of your life. 'Sufficient' walking is an important to the circulation of blood as motion is to a stream of water. If the activity is deprived, both become stagnant.

Stress and strain can be counter-acted and even prevented by regular vigorous walking; it is a natural antidote. It is by far the best and safest exercise of all.

iv) **Yoga:** Yoga seeks to develop the total man through harmonious evolution of his physical, mental, moral and spiritual powers in the course of a disciplined and well-regulated life.

According to yoga, man has to ultimately supersede his personality complex to enable him to reach the level of the basic consciousness (Kaivalya) - the maximal state of evolution.

Adding spiritual dimension to health is very close to the yogic approach to health. There are a number of studies conducted by Indian scholars to test the importance of yogic practices in producing a series of significant psychological, physiological, endocrinal and metabolic changes in the body.

"Hatha Yog" is unisex Yoga. In the West it is best known and most popular yoga. Yoga means the union or fusion of "Jivatma" and "Paramatma". It involves various "asanas" or body postures and breathing exercises. Among these, "shavasana" or the corpse pose is the best. It brings not only mental calm and relief from stress but better health, more vigour and a more alert mind.

Yogic curriculum consists of both mental and physical exercises. "Yamas" and "Niyamas" are mental exercises whereas "asanas" are physical exercises.

### Spiritual Dimensions of Health

According to Bisht (1985), the need for a new definition of health as a state beyond the mere absence of disease has been recognised by health professionals in the last few decades. It has progressively been realised that maintenance of health encompasses in addition to treatment of physical disease, coping mechanisms of dealing with psychological stress, prevention styles and general well-being. Illness is now considered to be physiologically and chemically grounded but socially and culturally conditioned.

Health is perceived as a multi-dimensional process involving the well-being of the whole person in the context of the environment. The perfect functioning approach to health conceptualises biological health as a state in which every cell and every organ is functioning at optimum capacity and in perfect harmony with the rest of the body; psychologically, as a state in which the individual feels a sense of subjective well-being and of mastery over his environment; and socially, as a state in which the individual's capacities for participation in the social system are optimal.

The traditional concept classifies all human health or ill health into the three categories and levels of "adhibhautika", "adhidivaika" and "adhyatmika" corresponding to the physical, psychical or mental and spiritual dimensions of human personality.

The spiritual dimension is not something supernatural, but only super-sensory and super-intellectual. Spirituality contributes to mental health. It contributes to discipline of mind and body, positive attitude to physical work, dignity of labour and development of a work culture. It also promotes a positive attitude to inter-personal role conflict and other stresses of life. It cultivates a desire for introspection and self-analysis.

### Total Health Includes Spiritual Well-being

The definition of health limiting it only to physio-psycho-socio fields is incomplete. Health is an integral concept which comprehends the totality of our being.

True health has to extend not only to physical fitness but also to the simultaneous psychological and spiritual well-being.

In a broader perspective, the physical body of the human being is not as important as the spiritual, intellectual and emotional aspects. The mind draws its power from the spirit, transmits it to all the body organs and ensures their rhythmic and coordinated functioning.

It has been stated that health may not be everything but everything without health is nothing. The concept of health considered as a state of physical, mental and social well-being is inadequate vis-à-vis the urges of higher relations inherent in human beings. A pack of wolves could be strong mentally alert and socially well knit, and be as healthy as a group of physically fit, mentally aware and socially compact group of human beings, but the human perspective involving qualitative values of life is what distinguishes the group of healthy human beings from the former.

If we acknowledge the fact that we have a trinity of body, mind and spirit, then we are total individuals only when our body-self, mind-self, and spirit-self are unified to work in harmony with each other. To achieve total holistic health, one must first consider nutrition and physical exercise as partners in establishing and maintaining a healthy body. Second, one must develop mental exercise programmes to help achieve self-mastery and self-regulation. And third, one must breathe life into the spirit by creating a positive healthy belief factor and developing a capacity both to give and to receive love and affection. This is referred to as the holistic health approach.

### Conclusion

Finally, we can conclude by saying that stress is known to have two faces. It can be an individual's worst enemy or his best friend. In its role as an enemy it wears one down in a number of subtle ways and hits at the bodily and mental capacities. As a friend, it makes one aware of challenges, progress and development. An optimum level of stress is highly conducive to superior performance.

We also interestingly find that in India we have traditions dating back to a few thousand years to cope and deal with stresses and stress manifestations. Probably, there is no other culture or civilisation which can contribute today to our understanding of the stress phenomena.

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