Chapter I

Introduction
1.1 Introduction:

Man, from time immemorial, has always shown his desire to learn. He learned the skill of hunting, making instruments, farming and so on. While doing so, he found that along with him there are others who are also interested in learning and with whom he could share his learning. This shared learning slowly took the form of Gurukuls and these Gurukuls were headed by learned, well-informed and able leaders who managed various learning activities. These further gave rise to today's concept of University – “The House of Learning”! The higher educational institutions were established as learning institutions to safeguard and ensure the unity of knowledge and to consume, transmit, disseminate and diffuse knowledge over centuries from generation to generation.

The ancient Indian universities – Takshashila, Nalanda, Lintsu, Hu Lin of China, Quariar of Arabia or those that evolved in Bologna and Paris, in Europe – all served these functions and similarly, the modern universities followed suit.

Today, the majority of modern universities and higher educational institutions are considered to be agents of change in attitudes and values, along with personality and human resource development. Newman’s (1853) idea of a “University Man”, independent of the subject studied included the development of cognitive skills and certain affective
qualities. He saw the ends implicit in higher education in both the fulfilment of the individual and the improvement of the society. Due to these functions, educational institutions all over the world, have become unique institutions with millions of people employed and millions of students being educated. In India, approximately 15,00,000 people are involved in the educational system in one way or the other and the educational systems are identified as the largest enterprise of all – the same being true almost all over the world.

In the latter part of the twentieth century, we have witnessed (in the country) a tremendous proliferation of educational institutions. These institutions are faced with many challenges such as the demands of society and industry, the increased enrolment of students, financial constraints, changing values, culture, and many other similar demands.

Running an institution in such a situation has become a complex task leading to a number of demands on the leadership of the institution. In most cases, the heads of these educational institutions are merely appointed on the basis of seniority and their academic experiences - unmindful of the much needed psychological stamina to govern such institutions - which may lead to phenomenal stress. Though, so far, there is no mention of academic administration being a stressful profession, one can visualise the vulnerability of this profession that has increasing demands from the government, management and the system itself. It was therefore, worth while to conduct an exploratory study to
discover the possibilities of work-related stress experienced by these managers of higher educational institutions.

The expansion vis a vis the number of students combined with the overt attempt by our government to influence the curriculum of higher education, in part, has created a crisis. Graffin (1997) said that higher education is in a state of crisis in relation to funding, how to conceive and manage teaching – learning and the management of academic time and priorities.

A number of researchers and scholars of various disciplines have started looking at educational institutions closely in recent years. However, the review of present literature indicates that the work done in the area of academic administration has been towards social and educational aspects. There is very little research done in the area of stress experienced by the academic managers of the higher educational institutions. The Fourth Survey of Educational Research in India (1983 – 88) and the subsequent Fifth Survey (1989 – 94), stated that many research studies are conducted on the leadership role in educational institutions with a focus on supervision, training, job motivation, and organisational climate. However, the area related to stress and coping is as yet untouched. Hence, a need was felt to conduct a study that could identify different work stressors experienced by the academic managers of higher education and the different coping strategies adopted by them.
The areas that needed special investigations were:

- The specific stressors faced by the academic managers of the higher educational institutions.
- The effects of the organisational milieu on the stress experienced by them.
- The relationship between personality traits and stress levels of academic managers.
- The stress responses as reflected on physiological and psychological dimensions, and
- The coping strategies used by the academic managers.

1.2 Conceptual Backdrop:

Cox (1981) classically defined stress as "a perceptual phenomenon arising from a comparison between the demand on the person and his ability to cope. Imbalance (when coping is important) gives rise to the experience of stress and a response to it. Coping is both physiological and psychological (cognitive and behavioural strategies). If normal coping is ineffective, stress is prolonged and abnormal responses may occur. Prolonged exposure to stress, per se, may give rise to functional and structural damage."

A response to stress can be categorised as being physiological, cognitive, emotional and behavioural. Physiological responses include changes in blood pressure, heart rate, skin conductivity, respiration, and circadian rhythms, while cognitive responses involve distractibility, an inability to
concentrate, a performance disruption, and intrusive or repetitive thoughts. Fear, anxiety, excitement, embarrassment, anger, depression and denial are considered, as emotional responses whereas behavioural responses can be limitless—basically—confrontational (fighting) or withdrawal (fleeing).

It has been proved that personality factors have a direct effect on the stress experienced by the individual and his coping. Kobassa (1981), introduced "hardiness" as a behavioural aspect of personality which helps in coping with stress. Some studies have explored the effect of the personal resources such as health, self-esteem, social support, education, diet, life-style on stress experienced by the individual.

**Stress and Illness:**

Solomon, Amkrant and Rubin (1974) described in their research that stress induces immuno-suppression due to cortisol release but it is also a direct result of stress induced changes in the thymus and general cell production.

Chronic severe tension (as in the executive monkey syndrome) often results in ventricular fibrillation. It has been proved that cardiovascular diseases, carcinoma, psycho-sexual maladjustment such as hysteria, amenorrhoea and dysmenorrhoea are other common manifestations of stress. It is also proved that stress initiates gastric ulcers.
Stress and the models explaining its correlations:

A number of models have been used and developed by many researchers to establish a correlation between the different variables of stress. Some of them focus mainly on the stressors or coping styles of individuals while few eclectic models give an overall picture.

One of the most holistic models is the one proposed by Cooper and Robertson (1979). Their model, related to occupational stress, overviewed intrinsic job factors, role stress, interpersonal relationships at work, career development, organisational climate, home / work interface, personality, life events, physical health status, and job satisfaction.

Enormous work has been done in the area of work related stress, both in India as well as in other countries. Pareek (1988) and Pestonjee (1992) have been instrumental in starting studies related to role - stress in India. There are studies conducted to establish a correlation between the various job - related stressors, personality types and the coping strategies used by the individual. The studies related to executive stress have mainly focused their attention on stress due to a difference in work - load or work responsibilities at various levels of management.

The present study was been evolved with the organisational role stress as its central concept, role being the function that one performs in response to the expectations of others from the role occupant. The concept of role is vital for the integration of the individual in an organisation. Every
organisation has its own structure and goals and so does the individual who has his own personality and needs. When these interact with each other, on the one hand it may lead to integration of the role, while on the other hand it may lead to role stress. Role is a system by itself and the concept of role goes beyond the concept of job. If the individual has the knowledge, technical competence and skill required for his role, he becomes an effective job holder. However if his role does not allow him to use his competency, or demands more than he can give, or if it expects something else, then the role itself can be very stressful.

**Biological Causes of Stress:**

Nature has its own rhythm, which manifests into the seasonal cycles and the human body runs attuned to these cycles. The natural biorhythms, healthy nutritional habits and natural environment are necessary factors for a human body to function in harmony with nature. Alterations in these may lead to an imbalance of the system. Studies conducted on the human body have found that changes in biorhythms, nutritional habits and noise pollution may lead to a very stressful existence.

At present, however, SPEED seems to be ruling life! It is probably wrong to call the current era an “era of information” but one could term it as an “era of speed”. Everything in this era moves at a fast pace, for example, fast food, fast learning, fast knowledge, fast information technologies, and so on. Every single invention in the technological field seems to be focusing on speed. How fast it works, is the basic criterion
of its success. Everybody seems to be hurrying to reach somewhere, both physically and psychologically.

When one looks carefully at the present quality of life, 'speed' seems to create not only unrest but also irritability, frustration, confusion, which in the long run may lead to physical and psychological problems. In India, especially in urban cities, life seems to be changing fast and to such an extent that coping with its multiple and contradictory demands itself is stressful.

It has been proven scientifically that certain types of food can actually contribute to stress. Sympathomimicking agents are chemical substances which mimic the sympathetic stress response e.g. Caffeine (coffee) and xanthines (tea, cola, chocolate and cocoa). Vitamin B-complex (especially B-1, B-5, and B-6) deficiency leads to anxiety reaction, depression, insomnia and cardiovascular weakness, whereas Vitamin B-2 deficiency causes stomach irritability and muscle weakness. It has been found that vitamin C is closely related to the immune system of the body.

An excessive intake of sugar has been shown to lead to hyperglycaemia immediately followed by hypoglycemia that leads to nausea, staggering, slurred speech and fainting. At the same time salt intake when excessive, may lead to fluid retention and an increase in nervous tension (through 'oedema'). Excessive fluid retention leads to higher blood pressure. Smoking leads to sympathomimicing and thus acts as a
predecessor of stress. On the other hand, it has been found that vegetarian and non-vegetarian diet has its own effect on the way individuals handle stress.

Noise has been shown to act as a stressor causing physiological reaction that stimulates the sympathetic nervous system, causing annoyance and subjective displeasure and a disruption of ongoing activities. Research has demonstrated that noise can produce cardiovascular change as a stress response. It is capable of decreasing circulation to the arms, legs, hands and feet and it is also seen to increase blood pressure.

As it is evident from the above discussion, physiological basis and psychological realities of an individual reveal objective data, especially in behavioural studies. There is very limited demographic data available on the psychological and physical health status of the academic managers of higher educational institutions. Therefore the present study was undertaken to find out answers to the following questions:

- How many of the academic manager of higher educational institutions suffer from heart trouble, high blood pressure, asthma and other stress related health problems?

- What is the role of psychosocial and physical status of academic managers on the stress experienced by them?
What could be the effect of nutritive habits and the physical and intrinsic environmental factors on the coping mechanisms with its stress levels?

A study conducted at the Department of Health Studies Sheffield City Polytechnic by John Bratt, (1978) is worth mentioning at this juncture, which reviewed the psychological evidence of stress among teachers. He used the Social Readjustment Rating Scale (Holmes and Rahe, 1967), General Health Questionnaire (Goldberg, 1972) and Eysenck's Personality Inventory (1969). It was found that the demands arising from students, the responsibility for educational standards as reflected in the expectations of teachers' role set and society at large, the collective liability for administration and order, within the institution - relate directly to the appearance of stress symptoms, particularly psychological disturbances such as loss of self-confidence and psychosomatic disturbances, as psoriasis and migraine.

A relevant fact that emerged from the study was the mental health status of teachers was at risk. It was evident that more support services were needed for teachers who themselves felt that they were not coping adequately. Also, the principals of these institutions needed psychological stamina to cope with the stressful work situations, both academic as well as administrative in nature, while managing the problems of clerks and teachers. Over all - it was noted that stress on the job becomes an occupational hazard especially for certain helping
professionals such as physicians, dentists, teachers, counsellors and so on.

Unfortunately, time and again, society has held the educational system responsible for most of its problems. The educational institutions have been a target of attack for socio-communal issues. What is erroneously mentioned in press reports about the educational systems and its functioning, only adds to the stress levels of the academic managers. The review of news items reveals that principals are criticised for all the ills of society like, increasing crime in society, suicidal attempts in institutions, job market-slags, and so on.

The above mentioned theoretical and empirical data indicates that various factors contribute towards the experience of stress and the responses to stress are multidimensional, involving different kinds of responses in different systems, different individuals and different situations. Therefore, studies related to stress need a well-developed research design that can view different factors causing stress and the intricate correlation between personality variables, work related stressors, life style of the individual and stress experienced by him. Finally one can state is that it is immensely important to study the individual as a whole in a specific situation at a specific period of time.
1.3 Scope of the Study:

The main goal of the study was to develop a systematic and theoretical understanding of the relationship between five major dimensions, namely, work-environment, life style, personality factors, health status, and the coping strategies used by these academic managers of the higher educational institutions.

In order to achieve this goal, the study encompassed the following objectives:

- To identify work stressors as experienced by the academic managers.
- To understand the effects of the institutional milieu on the level of stress experienced by them.
- To understand the significance of personality traits on the stress levels experienced by the academic managers.
- To study the different coping strategies.
- To study the health-status of the academic managers.
- To understand the significance of life-style and its impact on the stress experienced.

This chapter gives an insight into stress as a phenomenon as manifested by different psychological and physiological attributes and reactions, as well as, personality patterns.