CHAPTER IV

STRESS – AN OVERVIEW BASED ON

PATANJALI’S YOGA SUTRA

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, a detailed rendering of stress concepts from the view of point of Western Scholars and researchers have been presented. These ideas are of recent past, born of western urgency in finding remedies for medical problems. However, there exists a system in India, handed down by its ancient wisdom of distant past, that addresses the question of stress, to an un-paralleled precision and clarity to free the human beings from the clutches of sufferings.

This chapter is at best can only be considered as a modest attempt to briefly present the profound yogic wisdom of Sage Patanjali, expressed through his monumental work known as “YOGA SUTRĀ”.
4.2 **THE CONCEPT OF DUKHA - SUFFERING**

One of the eternal quest of human beings is to be happy and free from sufferings. Every being in this world without exception seeks happiness. Even an insignificant creature as an ant tries to avoid pain by crawling away from the railway track when the mighty engine crosses the track. Man has experienced a life of pleasure mixed with pain. Sufferings have increased from time to time. Preventive measures have been taken to get rid of this worldly misery but they have not borne any appreciable result. Infact, eradication of misery has been next to impossible. Enlightened persons in all cultures tried to find a way out of this viciousness.

In India these enlightened men are known as RSIS, who discovered that the mistaken identities between the sentient soul and non-sentient material world become the cause of these miseries.

In that process they reflected more about the miseries or sufferings. They called it as “Dukhā” (दुःखा). It is a state opposite of ‘Sukhā’ (सुखा). Sukhā means “comfortable, pleasant, expansive, agreeable etc.” Dukhā means “pain, hardship, misery, suffering, discomfort, distress”.
Samkhya Philosophy of Sage Kapila, also recognises Dukha and goes on to categorise the sufferings.

दु:खायामिव्याबादात सिङ्गासा तरसवालक्ष हेतुः ।
हस्ते साधपर्वा चेत्त नैकान्त्त्यान्त्तोभावात् || ॥ ॥

Dukha – traya – bhīghātate jījnāsa tad – abhīghātaka – betāu
Drste sā parthā cet nāikāntā – tyāntato – bhāvat ॥

Samkhya Karika Sutra 1

"From the torment caused by the three kinds of pain, proceeds a desire for enquiry into the means of terminating them; ................."¹

Three kinds of pain constitute, ‘dukhatrayā – the triad of pain’ these are Ādhyātmikā – intra-organic, Ādhibautikā – caused by external influence and Ādhidaivikā – caused by supernatural agencies. Here, the intra-organic is two fold, bodily and mental. Bodily pain is caused by the disorder of wind, bile and phlegm, and mental pain caused by lust, anger, greed, infatuation, fear, envy, grief and non-perception of particular objects. Pains that are responsive to external remedies are of two varieties: they are (a) Ādhībautika, i.e. caused by external influences and (b) Ādhīdaivika, i.e. caused by Supernatural influences. Ādhībautika misery is caused by men,

beasts, birds, reptiles, plants inanimate things and natural influences like water and fire and Ādīdāivika misery is caused by the providence.

4.3 PATANJALI’S CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Yoga Sutra of Patanjali, essentially deals with Ādhyatmika Dukha i.e. the suffering caused by the self, here it implies the mind. Although all schools of philosophy strive to achieve the same goal – i.e., freedom from suffering, yoga recognises the existence of human mind and acknowledges its role in day to day functioning in combating the suffering.

This fact is established by Patanjali in his Yoga Sūtra

योगः - चित्रनिरोधः |

Yogah citta Vṛtti Nirodhaḥ! Yoga Sūtra 1.2

"Yoga is the process of changing a distracted mind into a focussed one"

Usually we assume that the causes of stress are external one. According to Yogic thought, the basic cause of the problem lies in the mind. As human beings, we perceive the world through our mind. When the mind perceives something as an obstacle or a threat, the body reacts
with a flight or fight response. It is in the mind that disintegration occurs, influencing our perception. If the mind is clouded, because of agitation, distraction or conditioned by habit, then our perception may be faulty, landing us in trouble affecting our body and breath.

When our perception is clear, we are able to see things as they really are and to deal with them in a balanced, steady and flexible way. When we lose this clarity and our perceptions become clouded, we experience stress and react accordingly.

When the mind is clear, we see things as they really are:

- Perceiver
- Mind
- Object

When the mind is not clear. Our perceptions becomes distorted.

- Perceiver
- Mind
- Object

The first symptom of this situation, according to Patanjali, is known as “Dukha”


"Mental discomfort – negative thinking – inability to remain at ease in any body posture and difficulty in regulating the breath."²

A person can have one or all of these symptoms. ‘Dukha’ is an uncomfortable feeling of restriction or internal suffocation. The well known ‘stress syndrome’ of the modern world is one example of the result of this state.

4.4 WHAT CAUSES DISTORTION OF MIND?

According to Patanjali, the mind is disturbed due to what he calls as Klesa or impurities.

“Such practice will surely remove the obstacles that prevent clear perception”.

Hereby referring the possibility of clear perception by reducing the impurities (klesa). Patanjali also indicates that the impurities are the cause for distortion.

Patanjali goes on to enlist the Klesas or impurities, that causes distortion in perception. They are,

अविद्या - अस्मिता - राग - द्वेष - अभिविवेश्या -
कृष्णाः।

Avidyā – Asmita – Raga – Dvesa – Abhinivesah klesah

Yoga Sutra II.3

“False understanding – mistaken identity (Ego)
Excessive desire – Hatred and fear or anxiety.

4.5 HOW TO OVERCOME

Patanjali suggests one simple solution .... that is to discipline the mind. When the mind is disciplined, to be free from impurities, the

3 Ibid, p.25.
perception becomes more accurate and therefore our actions based on this perceptions will not cause suffering.

While acknowledging that the mind is both the source of and solution to our problems, Patanjali, identifies the uniqueness of each individual, not only at physical level but also at mental, emotional and spiritual levels of existence. This is why he suggests many tools to select from, in order to make the mind disciplined and thereby to cause reduction of impurities (Kleśa). Then that person is free from suffering or stress.

योगाङ्गनुष्ठानात् – अशुद्धिकर्मः – ज्ञानदीपितः: –
आतिवेक्षयाते:

Yogāṅgānusthānāt Aśuddhiksaye Yoga Sūtra II.28

“By practicing eight aspects of yoga, the impurities can be reduced ....”

In this Sutra, Patanjali recommends the eightfold path to reduce the impurities.

In this context three important observations with regard to life style behaviour (coping stategies) referred in the above Sūtra is enlisted.
They are,

(i) The emphasis in yoga is on doing and practicing, not on intellectual understanding. That is why Patanjali, chose to use the term Anustānāt, meaning “to be followed closely”.

(ii) The eight fold steps is a process through which a person can attain freedom.

(iii) This process helps in the reduction of impurities and not in its total elimination. The use of the word (क्षयः) Ksayam – meaning reduction, amplifies this standpoint. Since the reduction alone is emphasised, it implies that the yoga practice should be regular and continuous.

This is the essence of Patanjali’s Philosophy.

4.6 A BRIEF ON PATANJALI AND YOGA SUTRA

We do not have a conclusive evidence to know when yoga began. Earliest written evidence can be traced to Vedas, which were dated 1500-1800 BC. But it was during the period of the Upanishads (800-200 B.C.) as Indian thinkers sought to comprehend the meaning of creation and the purpose of life that yoga rose to prominence.
The word yoga, according to a leading Sanskrit Scholar, is a fluid one, used in a variety of senses, philosophical and other... The root from which it is derived meant originally to “hitch up”, as horses to a vehicle; then figuratively, to put (anything) to active, vigorous and purposeful use... [Yoga] may mean simply ‘method, means’; and it is so used in the epic\(^4\) i.e., the Mahābhāratha (composed with in the time span 400 B.C. - A.D. 400) which includes the famous Bhagvad Gītā.

But “Yoga” as a way of salvation per se has another meaning than “method”. “This other meaning is “exertion, disciplined activity’, a regular disciplined course of action leading to a definite end, namely, the end of emancipation”.\(^5\)

In the Bhagavad Gītā, Yoga sometimes means “remaining in worldly life and doing one’s duty, without selfish interest."\(^6\) In other sanskrit texts, however, yoga is normally used in the sense of disciplined activity”, the activity specifically implied being ‘dhyāna’ (sometimes translated as meditation). But yoga has yet another connotation in the classic text by Patanjali, the yoga sūtra.

\(^5\) Ibid, p.37.
\(^6\) Ibid, p.39.
The date of the yoga sūtra is uncertain. Indian Tradition places it back in the upanishadic period, but some Western scholars argue for the fourth or fifth century A.D. What is beyond question, regardless of when it achieved its final form, is that the yoga sūtra represents a very old science. It is remarkable for the eloquence and conciseness, and its primacy is accepted by all schools of yoga. Furthermore, yoga sūtra is included as one of the six darshanas or basic philosophical systems of modern Hinduism.

A sūtra is a maxim or aphorism connected sequentially to other sūtras. The word also refers to the entire compilation. The yoga sūtra is made up of 195 Sūtras divided into four parts or books.

The second sūtras of Part 1 defines yoga as Citta Vṛitti Nirodah: a state of mind in which, for a moment at least, there is full attention and accurate observation. The movement toward Citta Vṛitti Nirodha is analysed in the first three sūtras of Part III (which deals with the results of the yoga practice) First the mind is drawn to some object. Then it becomes more and more involved with the object. (This stage is dhyāna, the word being used here in a technical sense) ultimately the perceiving mind transcends self consciousness an in effect, merges with the object. This is
Sāmadhi, and the clarity that ensues it, for Patanjali, the subtle meaning of yoga.

4.7 ESSENCE OF YOGA SŪTRA

Part I of the Yoga Sūtra (subtitled “On Samadhi”) looks into the implications of Citta-Vritti nirodha. The term Citta Vritti means “activity (singular or plural) of the mind”. Patanjali recognises five types of activity. Correct cognition (through first-hand experience, inference and authoritative testimony), erraneous cognition, imagination, sleep and memory. The five activities are not in themselves good or bad, but may have positive or negative consequences.

“Mind” in Yoga theory, does not include the entire territory of consciousness, as it generally does in western usage. The functions we ascribed to “mind” are divided, in yoga, between – Citta – responsible for all thinking and feeling – and Purusa, which is conceived of as pure consciousness: that which animates the Citta.

Purusā is that faculty is us whose role is to observe, to bear witness. All other functions of “mind” belong to Citta, which is the instrument or

7 Yoga Sūtra, Chapter 1 Sutra 3-4
agent of Purusa. Both are essential, but it is Purusa which is at the center of our being. When there is Citta-Vrthi Nirodha, Purusha can see clearly, and what we do is likely to turn out well. But when Citta is disturbed, Purusa becomes obscured, and our action loses some of its integrity.

In Part II of the Yoga Sutra, Patanjali tries to analyze why Samādhi is not as simple as it sounds. He isolates five internal forces (Kleśas) that work to disturb our minds and corrupt our actions. Any one of these five Kleśas may preponderate – the others being temporarily concealed – or they may all be more or less attenuated. At best, they remain potential as seeds awaiting the right conditions for sprouting.

The danger in the Kleśas, is that they are self-aggrandising. Actions motivated by Kleśa have a residues, which adds to our store of Kleśas and prejudices future action. We cannot cease acting, but we can strive to reduce Kleśas. It is questionable, however, whether the Kleśas can be eliminated altogether. The sensitive person, therefore, remains a little wary even when things seem to be going well.

Infact, the usual state of affairs is not joy at all, but rather what is called dukha. The opposite of sukha. Dukha can be defined as “pain

\[^8\] Yoga sutra, Chapter III Sutra 10-14.
hardship, misery, suffering, discomfort, distress, anxiety”. It may be sensed physically, or it may be exclusively in the mind – an uneasiness or tension, or a feeling that our options are restricted or our freedom compromised. Dukha may be imposed on us by an outside agency, or we may bring it on ourselves.

Even if we could prevent the latter kind, we would still have to contend with the farmer. Perhaps the best we can do is to try to avoid, or at least be prepared for, the dukha that has not yet arrived.⁹

The reciprocal relationship between action and Kleša explain why an unusual type of action is required - one which is not deliberate or tied to the past. If we could improve the quality of action we must allow for a little reflection. The true moment of yoga is the pause before action. It is before we begin acting that we are most clear. Action coming after reflection is therefore less likely to turn out wrong.

For Patanjali, yoga resides not only in reflection known as Dhyāna samādhi, but in the procedure employed to encourage that state. Part II of

_Yoga sūtra, Chapter II Sutras 15-16._
Yoga Sūtra (subtitled “on Practice”) recommends first the yoga of action\(^\text{10}\) (Kriya yoga) intended to give us an intimation of Samadhi and weaker Kleśas; then the more ambitious and inclusive “Eight-part Yoga”\(^\text{11}\) (Astanga Yoga).

However helpful solitary meditation may be it must not be at odds with the lives of relation, we necessarily lead. Accordingly, the Eight Part Yoga rests on principles of right conduct. These are ten in number, and are divided into two groups, called yama and Niyama\(^\text{12}\)

In the first group are:

1. Kindness, harmlessness (ahimsa)
2. Truthfullness (Satya)
3. Non-stealing, honesty (asteya)
4. Continence moderation in sensual desires (brahmacarya)
5. Absence of greed non-possessiveness (aparigraha)

In the second group are:

6. Purity, cleanliness (Sauca)

\(^{10}\) *Yoga sūtra, Chapter II Sutra* 1-2.

\(^{11}\) *Yoga sūtra, Chapter II Sutra* 28-29.

\(^{12}\) *Yoga Sūtra, chapter II Subās* 30-45.
7. Contentment (Santosa)

8. Self discipline, austerity; keeping oneself fit (tapas)

9. Study, introspection, intellectual earnestness (Swādhyāya)

10. Humility in action: acknowledging a higher principle (Ishwara Pranidhāna).

It must not be assumed that yama and niyama have to be mastered before one can proceed in yoga. In fact, they can never be mastered, but continue to provide a standard of behaviour for practitioners at all levels.

By the time the Yoga Sūtra was composed, yoga had become far more than a technique for achieving magical powers or release from worldly bondage. It had matured into a comprehensive approach to life, requiring a solid foundation in interpersonal morality. Teachers of yoga had also become convinced that, far from being irrelevant or inimical, Physical fitness is an impetus to spiritual progress. With “disciplined activity” extended to the physical as well as psychic level, the basis was laid for a system of integrated psysico-mental training with wide application. Meditation and liberation are admirable objectives, but they are extraordinarily elusive. To have an experience of these, most persons need down to earth preliminary technique.
Thus according to yoga, lofty aspiration is not enough. Even right conduct is not enough. We must also learn to understand ourselves as physical creatures. And that is the reason why yoga sutra offers Eight-part yoga.

4.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter has been devoted to a very brief review on the concept of stress, based on the view of Patanjali’s Yoga Sutra. Even though Patanjali’s canvass is quite broad in dimension and vision, only those areas that are relevant for this study have been dealt with in this chapter.

The detailed account of coping strategies has been dealt in the next chapter.