



## CONCEPTS OF AYURVEDA TO UNDERSTAND MIND SET FOR LEVERAGING STRESS.

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### ABSTRACT

*Purusha* (human being) constitutes *sattva* (mind), *atma* (sole), and *sarira* (body). The *tridosha* forms the functional components and *triguna* form the psychological components of *Purusha*. These six components complement each other and work in harmony to maintain the homeostatic state of body and mind. Endogenous and exogenous causes disturb the natural harmony between the two. Physical and psychological stress is a common problem faced in the present time. So *dosa* is maintained to function normally with proper food, activities, and medicines. Control over the state of mind and optimistic mind set is a necessity too. The concept of *triguna*, *trividha sattva*, *sattva sara purusha*, and examination of *sattva* are described in Ayurveda. The concepts help to understand the mind, control the mind and structure the mindset. Control over the mind and an optimistic mind set can be achieved by activating the parasympathetic nervous system. The activated parasympathetic state can check stress, increase its threshold level or have a positive outlook toward stress. *Sadvritta* (code of conduct) is yet another concept to influence parasympathetic activation. The present article is a study of the ayurvedic concepts of mind and mind set for leveraging stress.

**Key words:** *sattva*, *triguna*, *sadvritta*, stress, mind set

### INTRODUCTION

The different physiological and psychological aspects of a human being is described in Ayurveda.

*Purush* (human being in the present context) constitutes *sattva* (mind), *atma* (sole), and *sarira* (body).<sup>1</sup>

The *tridosha* consisting of the *vata*, *pitta*, and *kapha* form the functional components whereas *sattva*, *raja* and *tama* form the psychological components of *Purusha*.<sup>2</sup> These six components complement each other and work in harmony to maintain the homeostatic state of body and mind. *Vata*, *pitta*, *kapha* and *raja*, *tama* form the pathogenic factors also and disturbs health.<sup>3</sup> When the body is affected, the mind is synergistically affected. Physical and psychological stress are the common problems faced by the human population at present time vitiating the endogenous components of the body and mind. So *dosa* is maintained within the normal range of quantity and quality with proper food, activities, and medicines. Control over the state of mind and optimistic mind set is a necessity too. Concepts of *triguna* (psychological factors), *trividha sattva* (three types of mental state), *sattva sara purusha* (person with excellent mental features), and examination of *sattva* (mind) as a part of ten-fold examination are described in Ayurveda. The concepts help to understand the mind, control the mind and structure the mindset. Currently, psychological stress is a definite problem for the majority of the population. Control over the mind and an optimistic mind set can be achieved by activating the parasympathetic nervous system. The activated parasympathetic state can check stress, increase its threshold level or have a positive approach toward stress. *Sadvritta* (code of conduct) is yet another concept to influence parasympathetic activation. The present article is a study of the ayurvedic concepts of mind and mind set for leveraging stress.

#### Objective

The objective is to consolidate the concepts of understanding the mental disposition and mind set mentioned in ayurvedic literature for gaining the maximum benefit from stress.

#### Literature review

##### Mana (mind):

Mind coordinates between *jnanendriya* (sense organs), *karmendriya* (organs of action), and *atma* for physico psychological homeostasis of the body. It is known by name like *sattva*.<sup>4</sup> *Sattva* means existence, knowledge, or wholesome. Mind is the substratum

of *guna* (attributes) and *karma* (actions). *Anutva* (minuteness) and *ekatva* (singularity) are the qualities of the mind.<sup>5</sup> Mind is a single entity and connects with one *jnanendriya* at a time to perceive correct knowledge. Connection with different *indriya* occurs with rapidity due to its minuteness.

It regulates the *indriya* for knowledge perception.<sup>6</sup> Thought processing and decisive planning by the mind direct the *karmendriyas* for appropriate action at the proper time.

Concept of *triguna* (psychological factors):

Psychological factors are of three types, *sattva* (pure), *raja* (violent), and *tama* (dull) reflecting three mental dispositions.<sup>7</sup> The three factors are involved in showing different *manovritti* (attitudes) in a person. The attitudes appear as the interplay of good and bad deeds.

When *sattva guna* dominates the mind, the person becomes benevolent, can differentiate between, good and bad, true and false, pure and impure, desirable and undesirable actions.

When *raja guna* dominates, the person becomes active, enthusiastic, passionate; full of desire, longings, and attachment, and has an unpredictable notion of differentiating between right and wrong.

When *tamas guna* dominates, the person becomes apprehensive, vindictive, and lethargic.

A complete *satvika*, *rajasika*, or *tamasika* mind is rare and in such a situation individual with a *tamasic* state of mind will have a completely dull attitude, a *rajasic* mind will have a distractive attitude and a *satvika* mind will have a virtuous attitude. One single state of mind seldom prevails in human beings, rather, an admixture of three attitudes is found in the majority of people. There is the interaction between *satvika* and *rajasic* mind or *satvika* and *tamasic* mind. In such a condition *raja* and *tamas* are influenced, controlled, and guided by the *satvika* minds. The psychological factors are responsible for three types of *sattva* - superior, mediocre, and inferior.

Concept of three types of *sattva*

Understanding *sattva* is of prime importance and is mentioned under the *dasavidha rogi pariksha* (ten-fold examination of patient) in Ayurveda. The pa-

tient is examined with reference to his or her *prakriti* (physical constitution), *vikriti* (morbidity), *sara* (excellence of tissue), *samhanana* (compactness of organs), *pramana* (size or measurement of body structures), *satmya* (homologation), *sattva* (mind set or psychic condition), *aharashakti* (digestive potentiality), *vayamashakti* (ability to exercise) and *vaya* (age). The examination helps to ascertain the strength of the person and the strength of the diseases.<sup>8</sup>

Sattva is of three types *pravara* (superior), *madhya* (mediocre), and *avara* (inferior) types.

A person with superior *sattva* is characterized by good memory, devotion, gratefulness, wisdom, purity, excessive enthusiasm, skill, courage, valour, absence of sorrow, proper gait, depth of wisdom, sincerity in action, and virtuous acts such a person is called *sattva sara purusha*.<sup>9</sup> Even if he possesses weak physique because of superior *sattva* can tolerate serious exogenous and endogenous disease without difficulty.

A mediocre *sattva* person tolerates the pain and other stressful condition only with difficulty. When they realise that others can tolerate the same, they gain strength.

The inferior *sattva* person neither by themselves nor through others can sustain their mental strength and even posing strong physique cannot tolerate mild pain and stress. they are susceptible to fear, grief, greed, delusion, and ego and fall victims to depression, madness, and giddiness.<sup>10</sup>

#### Mindset

Mindset is the self-conception that helps to structure the self and guide behaviour. Mindset is the setting of the mind with consideration to subjects like health, stress, exercise, diets, and other activities. It has a strong impact on a person's ability to improve and face the knock-down situation.<sup>11</sup>

#### Stress

A feeling of not being able to manage the demands of daily life causes stress. Stress may be physical or mental. Stress can be acute or chronic. Acute stress is short-term stress and is of recent origin. They do not cause the same type of damage as found in long-

term or chronic stress. Chronic stressors are poverty, unsatisfactory family to name a few. Stress has alarming cognitive, emotional, and physical behavioural effects like inability to concentrate, judgement problems, short temper, depression, anxiety body ache constipation, eating and sleep disorder.<sup>12</sup>

Again, stress is the physiological response that allows the body to evade or challenge danger. The response is known as the fight or flight mechanism with activation of the sympathetic nervous system. When a human being faces a threat the body responds by producing stress hormones like cortisol, epinephrine, and epinephrine. They trigger physical reactions like increased blood supply to the heart and skeletal muscles for better oxygenation to the muscles while restricting supply to the abdominal viscera and the skin, increased tidal volume to meet up the excess demand for oxygen, increased perspiration for cooling the body and increased alertness by pupillary dilatation.<sup>13</sup> Stress of any kind effect the body and mind. Once the threat subsides the hormones that relax the mind and body release and activate the parasympathetic nervous system.

#### Parasympathetic action

The autonomic nervous system has functionally two distinct divisions, the parasympathetic and sympathetic nervous systems. The two system forms a complex network that preserves the integrity of physiological functions within the body. Unlike the sympathetic system that drives the fight and flight response in stressful conditions, the parasympathetic system predominates the rest and digest condition. The parasympathetic nervous system is responsible for conserving energy which is used later to regulate different functions. It maintains a resting heartrate, it is active for digestion, salivation, urination, lacrimation, defecation, and penile erection. The vagal tone that is tonic parasympathetic activation predominates over sympathetic tone at rest. Those with stronger vagal activity can relax faster after stress or come out of stress faster. Ethical codes are postulated in Ayurveda that can strengthen vagal activity.<sup>14</sup>

#### Concept of *Sadvritta*:

*Sadvritta*, the concept derived from two word “*Sad*” meaning good, and “*Vritta*” meaning conduct, habits, or behaviour. The unique concept *sadvritta* applicable to all age groups involves the regular practice of practical methods or conduct like ethical code of conduct, social code of conduct, mental code of conduct, moral code of conduct, and physical code of conduct that enhances *arogya* (health), happiness and longevity by *indriya vijaya* (control over the senses).<sup>15</sup> It reduces stress or increases the stress tolerance level by stimulating vagal activity.

## DISCUSSION

Mindset is of two types, fixed or growth type.<sup>16</sup> A person with a fixed mind set has a certain level of ability that cannot be changed. In a growth type of mind set the ability can be enhanced through effort.<sup>17</sup> People with the two varieties of mind set contemplate and acknowledge differently. People with different mindsets respond to different set back differently. People with a fixed mind set give up, are discouraged, and become uninterested in a setback while those with a growth type of mind set view set back as an opportunity to learn and overcome the problem.

*Triguna guna* (psychological factors or attributes) are *svatta*, *raja*, *tama*. They produce mental dispositions showing different types of *manovritti* (attitudes).<sup>18</sup> Positive attitude helps to develop the ability to learn new things and effect each and every thing that we do and think in our daily life, realize the value of challenges, and put in the effort to learn and grow to overcome the odds. A single type of mental disposition is rare. Usually attributes remain in combination, *sattvika-rajasika*, *sattvika-tamasika*, *rajasika-tamasika* and a combination of all three.<sup>19</sup> *Svattika* mental disposition is benevolent, *rajasika* is violent and *tamasika* is dull. So, attitudes vary. *Sattvika* person has a positive attitude, *rajasika* has a mediocre attitude and *tamasika* people have a negative attitude.<sup>20</sup> Since the combination of the *guna* are found and *raja* and *tamas* are influenced and guided by the *satvika* minds so in *satvika-rajasic* mental disposition there is a shift toward positive attitude and *sattvika-tamasika*

mental disposition a shift from negative toward the right or positive attitude is seen.

The mental disposition contributed to three types of *sattva*. *Pravara* (superior) *madhya* (mediocre) and *avara* (inferior) types. A patient is examined with reference to these three types of *sattva* to assess their ability to with stand pain and other challenges faced during ailments.

The three types of *sattva* are the automatic setting of the mind with regard to matters like health, stress, and others. They are the mindset according to ayurveda which gives a comprehensive outlook of a person as to how he perceives and take a decision regarding health issues.

*Pravara sattva* is a growth-type mind set with a positive attitude. This mind set is programmed and internalised in the early years of his life. The person confronts the agony of diseases in an easy way. He follows the prescription of medicine, a healthy diet, and exercises emphatically to overcome the torment. There is always an optimistic approach regarding diet and medicines medicines are not always tasteless and will be of benefit in curing the disease and exercises are not a boring job. This approach helps to get relief from the stress that develops in following the prescription.

*Madhya sattva* is also a growth-type mind set but this type of mind set is not programmed and internalised in early life. In *madhya sattva* mind set learning from the surrounding take place. Such a mindset cannot easily accept set back and pain and cannot overcome it on their own rather when they see others challenging the setback and getting control over it, they learn to gain strength and develop determination.

*Avara sattva* is a fixed type of mind set. People with a fixed mind set give up, are discouraged, and become uninterested in a setback, cannot view set back as an opportunity to learn and overcome the problem. The *avara sattva* person neither by themselves nor through others can sustain their mental strength, even with a strong physique cannot tolerate mild pain and stress.

The body's response to stress is depended on the mind set. *Pravara* and *madhya* *sattva* are the mind-

sets that can leverage stress for a better outcome than *avara sattva* in case of severe trauma or injury, people with *pravara* and *madhya* mind set have better posts traumatised growth, the body heals faster even in the maximum stressful condition. The stressful condition helps them to realise the purpose and values of life and helps to focus on a better result.

The ability to handle stress and even grow from it depends on how the stress is believed and viewed. If the stress is viewed as debilitating, then the ability to recover from the stressor is reduced while if viewed as empowering it enhances recovery.

Stress can be minimised, or its threshold level is increased depending on how we view stress. If we view it as empowering, then the body's vagal tone is activated. People with *pravara sattva* view stress as empowering, stress has a more constructive impact on their daily life than people of *madhya* and *avara sattva*. So parasympathetic nervous system and vagal tone are activated more in *pravara sattva* than in *madhya* or *avara sattva* people. Activated vagal tone or stimulated parasympathetic nervous system keeps the body in a rest and digest state, conserves energy, and maintains resting physiological functions. If the resting physiological state is maintained by activation of vagal tone, then the individual person will have a positive approach to stress. So, the aim may be to maintain the vagal tone and parasympathetic state of the body. *Sadvritta* is a code of conduct that provides tranquillity and stability to both mind and body, when regularly practiced, activates the vagal tone. Activated vagal tone readily helps to come out of stress or be optimistic in viewing stress as natural and unavoidable. The ayurvedic concepts not only help to manage stress but at the same time, the practice of social conduct and self-control helps to consider stress to be productive and get positively influenced by it.

## CONCLUSION

The concept of mindset has existed in the Ayurvedic treaties years ago as three types of *sattva*. The three *sattva* helps to view stress differently. A positive approach to stress is obtained by calmness and a resting

state of body and mind. The resting state can be procured by the regular practice of *sadvritta*. *Sadvritta* is a unique concept of ayurveda to activate the parasympathetic nerve for manoeuvring and leveraging stress.

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