



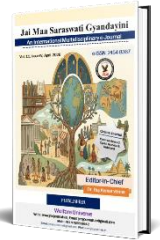
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## Devotion and Depression: A Theoretical Examination of How Structured Spiritual Practice Modulates Rumination, Helplessness, and Family Role Stress in Adult Indian Women

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### KEYWORDS

Depressive rumination, hopelessness, family role stress, Indian women, spiritual practice, puja, meditation, bhakti, psycho-spiritual wellbeing, meaning-making, cultural psychology, gender and religion, emotion regulation, coping, mental health India.

### ABSTRACT

This paper is going to take a look at how spiritual practice can help adult Indian women deal with psychological distress. Spiritual practice includes things like puja, meditation and reading scriptures. The paper will examine how these practices might help with three problems that many adult Indian women face: feeling depressed feeling helpless and feeling stressed about family roles.

The paper uses ideas from known psychologists to understand these problems. For example, it uses Nolen-Hoeksema's idea about how people think when they are feeling down. It also uses Seligman and Abramsons idea about how people feel when they think they have no control over their lives. It uses Goodes idea about how family roles can be stressful. The paper then goes on to identify four ways in which spiritual practice may help with these problems: allowing women to focus on something, helping them to find purpose in their lives, giving them support from their community, and helping them to feel more in control of their lives.

Spiritual practice is not a solution though. The paper also looks at how spiritual practice can be used to avoid problems instead of dealing with them. It looks at how women might use practice to hide their suffering instead of talking about it. The paper thinks about how things like caste, class and marital status can affect how women use practice. Finally, the paper talks about what this means for helping women with problems and what future research should look at. Spiritual practice, like meditation and reading scriptures can be helpful, for adult women but it is not always easy to use it in a helpful way.


## 1. INTRODUCTION

In homes in India people start their day with some spiritual activities. Usually, it is the woman of the house who does this. She will sit in a corner of the

kitchen or near the door light a Diya and say some prayers. She has been doing this since she was a child. It only takes a minute. This is something she does by herself. It is very personal.

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It might look like a thing but it could be doing a lot for her mind. Women in India have to deal with a lot of stress that people do not always see. Research shows that a lot of married women in India struggle with depression and anxiety. It is even worse for women who live with them in laws. This happens because women are expected to handle everything and do it perfectly. They have to be wife' daughters-in-law mothers and workers. People think that if a woman complains she is being selfish. If a woman stays silent and handles her problems alone, people think she is a "good woman". Women are not allowed to make their own choices either. They cannot choose how to spend their own money, who they hang out with or what they do with their own body. Many women believe suffering is normal for them, or that they somehow deserve it.

This paper pulls together ideas from psychology, sociology and woman's studies. It does not have its research but it tries to bring together what we already know to create a solid foundation for future studies. The paper will first talk about what we mean by some terms. Then it will discuss how Indian women practice spirituality. After that it will present a model that explains how spirituality affects women's minds. Finally, it will look at both the bad effects of this relationship between women and spirituality, in India.

### 1.1 Scope and Objectives

This paper has four goals:

- We want to understand how depression, feeling helpless and family stress affect Indian women. We will look at what

psychology says and what we observe in culture.

- We will talk about the types of spiritual practices that Indian women do. We will look at how they work and how they can help.
- We will suggest an idea that says spiritual practice can help with depression feeling helpless and family stress, in four ways.
- We will also look at when spiritual practice can make things worse not better. We will then think about what this means for doctors, community health and future research.

## 2. Understanding The Three Target Constructs

### 2.1 Rumination

Depressive Rumination is not just thinking about your problems. It is a way of thinking that Susan Nolen-Hoeksema talked about. Depressive Rumination is when you keep thinking about your problems and what might have caused them. You do not try to solve them. You just think about the things over and over. For example, you might think about something mean someone said to you or a decision you made that you regret or something you hoped for that did not happen. You think about these things a lot. You do not try to figure out what to do about them. This kind of thinking can be very bad for you. It is not like being sad or thinking about something that happened to you. Those things can help you feel better after a while. Depressive Rumination can go on forever. It can make you feel worse and worse.

The bad things that can happen because of

Depressive Rumination are well known. Depressive Rumination can make you more likely to get very depressed. It is not something that happens when you are depressed. It can also make your depression last longer and make it worse. It can even stop you from being able to think or do things that might help you feel better. Depressive Rumination is not just bad for your mind. It can also make your body feel bad. It can make you feel stressed have trouble sleeping and get sick easily. Women are more likely to do Depressive Rumination than men. This is true in different countries and for women of all ages. Susan Nolen-Hoeksema and her colleagues think this might be because women are often taught to be sensitive and think about their feelings than to take action and solve problems. In places like India, women often are not allowed to say how they really feel. If something bothering them, they cannot talk to anyone about it. So instead, they just keep overthinking it in their head.

### **2.1.1 Key Clinical Features of Rumination**

- You think about your problems and what might have caused them over and over
- You do not try to solve your problems you just think about them
- You think about the past a lot, like what someone said or did to you
- You feel bad, about your problems. You do not try to make yourself feel better
- Depressive Rumination can make you more likely to get depressed
- Women are more likely to do Depressive Rumination especially if they are not

supposed to express their feelings openly.

## **2.2 Learned Helplessness**

A Psychologist named Martin Seligman ran some tests using dogs. He found out that when dogs get shocked and they cannot do anything about it they stop trying to get. This happens even when they can actually escape. The dogs think that what they do does not matter. They think that trying to get is pointless.

When people think like this, they get depressed. They lose motivation they have trouble thinking clearly. They feel sad all the time.

Abramson, Seligman and Teasdale said that what matters is why people think they cannot do anything about their situation. If people think it is because of something about themselves and that it will always be this way and that it affects everything then they are more likely to get depressed.

For women this kind of thinking is not just something that happens sometimes. For women's. This is not just a one-off thing. It happens constantly. When no one values their opinions and they cannot make their own life choices, they start believing their wants do not count. They feel like nothing they do will actually make a difference.

Over time many women start to believe this. Overtime, they start feeling completely powerless. They think they are stuck a cannot change anything. And once they start thinking this way, it's really hard to break out of it, even if their situation actually improves.

### **2.2.1 Dimensions of Helplessness in the Indian Women's Context**

- Some women do not try to achieve their goals because they do not think they can succeed.
- Some women have trouble understanding that what they do can actually make a difference.
- Some women are always sad. They do not feel any emotions.
- Some women think that bad things happen because of something about themselves and that it will always be this way and that it affects everything.
- This kind of thinking creates a cycle. Women think they are powerless so they do not try to do anything. Then they feel helpless. They think that they are not good enough.

### **2.3 Family Role Stress**

William Goode said that people always have to deal with responsibilities. They have to balance their work their family and their social life. Sometimes it can be very hard to do all of these things.

For women it is especially hard. They have to take care of their families work and do other things. They do not have time, energy or resources to do all of these things.

There are reasons why Indian women have so much stress. First, they have to do things without getting any help. They have to work take care of their families and do other things. They do not get to choose what they want to do. They have to do everything.

Second people do not think that taking care of a family is work. They think it is something that women naturally do. So women do not get any recognition, for all the work they do. They get

tired. They cannot say anything because they will be seen as complaining.

Third women have to take care of everyone's emotions. They have to make sure everyone is happy and they have to solve all the problems. This is hard work but nobody recognizes it.

Fourth Indian women are living in a time of change. They are expected to be modern. They are also expected to follow traditional rules. This is very confusing. It causes a lot of stress.

#### **2.3.1 Main Reasons for Family Stress**

- Role overload: many tasks to do at the same time each with its own expectations
- Role conflict: different family members want different things from you
- Role ambiguity: unclear expectations from family members
- Emotional labour burden: being responsible for making everyone in the household happy
- Recognition deficit: not being appreciated for domestic and caregiving work
- Transition stress: struggling with old and new expectations at the same time

### **3. Spiritual Practice Among Women: Types and Psychological Structure**

#### **3.1 What We Mean by 'Structured Spiritual Practice'**

The term 'spiritual practice' covers different activities. Here it refers to activities that people do regularly to connect with something than themselves. Like God, the divine or a deeper level of consciousness. We use the word 'structured' to mean that these activities are done regularly with a plan and with a specific goal in mind.

This structured approach to spirituality is important for our lives. Research shows that doing things regularly can help reduce stress create a sense of stability and make us feel more in control. For women who have demands on their time and limited freedom a daily spiritual routine can be a rare experience that is truly their own.

Spiritual practice is important for women.

Women do practice to feel connected.

They seek connection, with something

It helps them feel more in control.

It gives them a sense of stability.

It reduces their stress.

It is their daily experience.

## **3.2 Forms of Structured Spiritual Practice**

### **3.2.1 Daily Ritual Worship. Puja**

Puja is a common daily spiritual practice among Hindu Indian women.

It is done in regions, castes and classes.

The main thing about puja is to show attention, care and devotion to a god or goddess.

This is done by lighting lamps giving flowers, incense, water and food and saying prayers and mantras.

For women the puja space is like a personal place of worship.

It can be a room, a shelf or just a corner of the kitchen.

It is a place where they can be alone and think about their faith.

#### **Here are some important things about puja:**

- It needs you to focus your attention so you can't just think about nothing.
- It gives you a space that is just yours even

in a shared home.

- Puja combines smells, lights, colours and sounds with devotion which's good, for your senses.
- It gives you a chance to express your feelings ask for things and feel better.
- Puja helps you start your day with something that you can control.

Puja is part of many women's daily routine and helps them feel connected to their faith. Every woman does puja her own way and it gives her peace and happiness. For Women, puja is how they show their love and devotion to God.

### **3.2.2 Meditation and Pranayama**

Meditation and pranayama are both parts of yoga. These practices are getting more popular in Indian cities and towns through yoga studios and online classes. Meditation helps people manage their emotions and thoughts. It cuts down worry and anxiety, and helps you focus better. Pranayama is basically controlled breathing that lowers stress and anxiety.

**How they help:** Meditation trains your focus, which helps you stop negative thoughts.

It allows you to be in now and not to overthink about the past.

Meditation is a means to observe your thoughts without being entangled in them.

Pranayama decreases tension and anxiety, making it easier to recover after bad circumstances.

### **3.2.3 Devotional Singing-** Bhajan, Kirtan, Satsang

India is a country where people sing devotional songs like Bhajan and Kirtan as a spiritual exercise.

Women frequently sing in groups. This is one of

the big times they get to hang out without their family. They sing together to assist de-stress and to raise their mood.

It builds support and camaraderie for women. It is a secure area for them to express their feelings too. When women sing together, they feel connected to one another. It helps them find new ways to deal with hard times. Plus, it gives them a sense of purpose and reduces loneliness.

### **3.2.4 Religious Fasting and Vows**

Lots of women in India fast for different reasons, and it can be good for their mental health. Fasting helps women feel more in control of their lives and gives them a sense of discipline.

### **3.2.5 Scriptural Engagement**

Reading and listening to sacred texts can help people understand their struggles and find meaning in life. These texts can provide a framework, for understanding suffering and adversity.

However, if people interpret these texts in a way that reinforces thoughts it can be harmful.

- Sacred texts can provide a way to understand and make sense of times.
- They can give people a vocabulary to talk about their struggles and find meaning in life.
- However, if people interpret these texts in a way that promotes passivity or acceptance of injustice it can be harmful.
- The benefits of reading texts depend on how people interpret them and whether they promote positive change.

## **4. THEORETICAL MODEL: FOUR MECHANISMS OF MODULATION**

The main idea of this paper is to propose a model that has four mechanisms. This model shows how spiritual practices can help people deal with problems. These mechanisms work together. Help each other out. They are explained separately so that we can understand them clearly.

### **4.1 Mechanism One: Attentional Redirection and the Interruption of Ruminative Cycles**

When people think about their problems much it takes up all their attention. They cannot think about anything. Spiritual practices can help people focus on something. For example, when people do a puja, they have to pay attention to the offerings. When they say a mantra, they have to say it. When they meditate, they have to focus. This helps take their mind off their problems.

Spiritual practices are good at taking people's attention from their problems. This is not a thing. It is a help. Mindfulness practices also do this. They help people with depression and anxiety.

What spiritual practice does more than mindfulness is giving people a sense of meaning. When people do practices because they really want to it helps them more than just doing it because they have to. For a woman who has done puja since she was a child it is not something she does. It is a way for her to connect with something than herself.

The idea of being a witness to your thoughts is important in spiritual practices. It means being aware of your thoughts without getting caught up in them. This helps people create distance between their thoughts and themselves. It makes their thoughts less powerful.

### **Key Theoretical Supports**

- Nolen-Hoeksemas idea is that when people are distracted from their problems, they feel better.
- Mindfulness research shows that meditation helps people stop thinking about their problems much.
- Attentional bias research shows that people focus on things because that is what they are used to.
- Cultural resonance hypothesis says that when people do things that're meaningful to them, they get better results.

#### **4.2 Mechanism Two: Meaning Reconstruction and the Buffering of Helplessness**

When people feel helpless it is because they think their actions do not matter. They think that things will happen no matter what they do. Spiritual practices can help people see things differently. They can help people find meaning in their problems.

Viktor Frankl said that when people can find meaning in their suffering, they are stronger. The person who can say that their suffering has meaning is different from the person who says that their suffering will never end.

Indian spiritual traditions have ways to help people find meaning. The idea of karma yoga is that people can offer their actions to something than themselves. This helps people feel like their actions matter even if they are not in control of what happens. The practice of seva is when people help others without expecting anything in return. This helps people see that their actions can be meaningful even if they are just taking care of their

family.

When people find meaning in their problems, they are not just sitting around feeling sorry for themselves. They are actually more able to do something about their problems.

#### **Key Theoretical Supports**

- Frankls idea is that when people find meaning in their suffering, they are stronger.
- Parks idea is that when people have a framework, for meaning they can cope better with stress.
- Attribution theory says that when people have a way to make sense of their problems, they are less likely to feel helpless.
- Intergenerational transmission says that when people have traditions and frameworks that have been passed down, they can use them to make sense of their problems.

#### **4.3 Mechanism Three: Communal Social Support and the Countering of Isolation**

The fact that social support helps people deal with stress is one of the well-established findings in psychology. This is known as the buffering hypothesis, which was proposed by Cohen and Wills. It says that having people around you who care about you can help you handle situations. For women, who often get their main support from their family having friends outside of the family can be really helpful. This is where spiritual activities like visiting to the temple or joining a women group may be particularly helpful. These

meetings give a forum for women to talk about their concerns without fear of being judged by their families. They can be who they are. Find a support group with ladies who understand what they are going through.

These groups are not just about socializing, they are also key to women's mental health. They produce a space in which women are able to develop relationships with each other that are not based on kinship. This may be incredibly empowering for women who are typically under a lot of pressure from their family. There is a really powerful feeling of being seen and heard by women. It can assist women to feel less alone and more supported.

#### **Key Theoretical Supports**

- Cohen and Wills buffering hypothesis: social support helps people deal with stress
- Kakars observation: womens spiritual groups provide a space for women to build relationships with each other that are not based on family ties
- Bhatts study: participating in womens groups can help reduce feelings of loneliness.
- Coping theory: being around people who can help you cope with stress can be really beneficial.

#### **4.4 Mechanism Four: Locus of Control Reframing and Agency Preservation**

The belief that people have control over their lives is very crucial for their health. People might get very passive when they believe they have no influence over what occurs to them.” Feel helpless

... If they feel like they have some control they are more likely to take action and try to make things better. It's incredibly crucial for women to feel in control, as they often have to deal with a lot in their life. “Spiritual practices like meditation and prayer can help women feel more in control of their lives. They can make women feel that they are not alone. That they have someone to turn to for support when times are tough.

This is not about giving up control to a power but about working together with that power to make things better. It's about feeling like you have a say in what happens to you when things are tough. This can be really empowering for women who often feel like they have no control over their lives. It can help them feel more confident and more able to handle challenges.

#### **Key Theoretical Supports.**

- Rotters locus of control theory: people who feel like they have control over their lives are more likely to be happy and healthy
- Pargament et al.: working together with a power can be really beneficial for mental health
- Banduras self-efficacy theory: feeling like you can handle challenges can be really important for mental health
- Existential psychology: taking action and trying to make things better can be really beneficial for mental health

#### **5. POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS**

The things we have talked about far can have a really positive impact on Indian women's mental health. They can help women feel more in control

of their lives more supported and more able to handle challenges.

### **5.1 Interruption and Reduction of Ruminative Thought**

One of the ways that spiritual practices can help women's health is by interrupting negative thought patterns. When women are able to focus on something other than their problems, they can start to feel better. This can be really helpful for women who often get caught up in thinking.

- Regular meditation can help reduce thinking
- Repeating mantras can help women focus on something other than their problems
- Hearing stories about other women who have gone through similar things can help women feel less alone
- Having a routine of practices can help women stay focused and positive

### **5.2 Emotional Regulation Enhancement.**

Being able to manage your emotions is really important for mental health. Spiritual practices can help women do this by teaching them how to calm down and focus. This can be really helpful for women who often feel overwhelmed by their emotions.

- Meditation and deep breathing can help women calm down and focus
- Doing rituals can provide a space for women to express their emotions
- Focusing on being calm and peaceful can help women reduce their stress levels
- Physiological research has shown that regular spiritual practice can reduce stress

and anxiety

### **5.3 Strengthening of Psychological Resilience**

Being able to bounce back from challenges is really important for mental health. Spiritual practices can help women do this by teaching them how to cope with stress and difficult situations. This can be really helpful for women who often face a lot of challenges in their lives.

- Spiritual practices can help women develop a sense of strength and resilience
- Being part of a community of women who support each other can be really helpful
- Having a sense of purpose and meaning can help women stay motivated and focused
- Spiritual practices can help women develop the self-discipline they need to handle challenges

### **5.4 Reframing of Family Role Demands**

One of the ways that spiritual practices can help women's mental health is by helping them see their family roles in a new light. When women are able to see their work as a way of serving others, they can start to feel more positive about it. This can be really helpful for women who often feel overwhelmed by their family responsibilities.

- Seeing family work as a way of serving others can help women feel more positive about it
- Spiritual practices can help women develop the patience and compassion they need to handle family challenges
- Having a daily routine of practices can help women stay focused and positive
- Spiritual communities can provide women

with the support and validation they need to handle family challenges

### **5.5 Social Support and Reduction of Isolation**

Finally spiritual practices can help women feel more connected to others and less alone. This can be really helpful, for women who often feel isolated and unsupported. When women are able to connect with others who understand what they are going through they can start to feel more positive and more supported.

Social isolation is a problem. It is when you feel like you are not connected to the people around you. This can lead to depression, anxiety and physical illness. It is as bad for you as smoking or being obese. When women take part in practices with others it helps to fix this problem. They become part of a group where they care for each other and have a goal.

The support they get from this group is special in ways.

- They are accepted for who they're not for what they do at home.
- The other women in the group understand what they are going through because they come from the culture.
- It is okay for them to go to these meetings because it is accepted by their culture. This means they can leave their house and meet people without anyone getting upset.
- The women in the group are equal they are not like a family where some people in charge of others.
- In some places people do not like to talk about health or they do not have access to

help. In these cases, spiritual groups can be a place to start for emotional support.

Spiritual practices like yoga and pranayama are also good for your health. This can help your health too.

- Yoga and pranayama can lower your blood pressure help you sleep better make your immune system stronger and reduce inflammation. All of these things can affect your health.
- Sleeping well is very important, for how you feel and think. It can help you control your emotions and reduce your chance of getting depression.
- When you do spiritual practices, you can feel more in control of your body and more confident. This can help if you are feeling depressed and disconnected from your body.
- The things you see hear and smell when you do practices can be very pleasant. This can help if you are feeling depressed and cannot enjoy things anymore.

### **6. Demerits And Negative Psychological Effects**

The picture we got in Section 5 is true. Has evidence to back it up but it is only half of the story. To properly appreciate this relationship, we need to look at the moments when spiritual activity does not serve women or perhaps harms them. These aren't isolated incidents. They are genuine and can have grave consequences for mental health.

#### **6.1 Spiritual Bypassing: Devotion as Avoidance**

John Wellwood's idea of bypassing is very important. It is when people use practice or ideas to

avoid dealing with their emotional pain instead of really trying to heal. Spiritual bypassing does not look like it is causing any problems. It can look like peace. A woman who's calm and surrendered who talks about accepting things and Gods will who never complains. When we see this in a situation that is really tough, we should be curious not impressed.

- Bypassing involves hiding emotions like grief, anger and fear behind acceptance. But these emotions do not just go away; they build up. Can cause physical symptoms, behavior problems or even a crisis.
- In our culture we often praise women who're spiritually calm and never complain. This can make it more likely for them to use bypassing as a way to deal with their emotions.
- Bypassing can prevent women from changing and growing because it makes them think they are not spiritual enough if they want to change.
- When we see a woman who's in a tough situation but does not seem to be upset, we should pay attention and try to understand what is going on.

## **6.2 Fatalistic Spirituality. The Reinforcement of Helplessness.**

Not all spiritual ideas are the same. Some ideas that say Gods will is absolute that our fate is fixed and that we should surrender completely can actually support patterns of behaviour that make people feel helpless. The difference between these ideas and the collaborative approach we talked about in

Section 4.4 is subtle but very important.

- If we think that acceptance is always a thing, we might not be able to tell the difference between accepting something we cannot change and giving up on something we can change.
- Fatalistic spiritual ideas. Like "this is my karma". God has willed this". Can make people feel like they are to blame for their problems and can make them feel depressed.
- If we tell women who are suffering that it is because of their spiritual failures we are adding to their shame and self-blame.
- Women who are in situations might be told to accept it spiritually instead of seeking help, which can have serious consequences.
- Religious leaders who tell women to stay in situations are not helping them; they are hurting them.

## **6.3 Compulsory Practice and Resistance to Authentic Engagement.**

The effects of spiritual practice that we talked about earlier depend on how the person feels about the practice. If they choose to do it because they want to and not because someone else is making them it can have a positive effect. If they are forced to do it it can be harmful.

- In some family's women are. Judged by their family members when they do spiritual practices. This can make the practice feel like a performance, not a spiritual experience.
- A woman who does puja because her mother-in-law is watching is not really

practicing spirituality; she is just doing what she is told.

- If women are forced to practice spirituality, they might feel resentful and upset which can make their problems worse.
- If women are not allowed to choose their spiritual path it can be a violation of their autonomy and can make them feel worse.

#### **6.4 Delay in Professional Help-Seeking**

One of the serious problems is that spiritual practice can be used instead of professional help, which can have serious consequences for women who are really struggling. In our culture mental illness is often. Spiritual explanations for problems are more accepted.

- Research has shown that people who seek help first might delay getting professional help, which can make their problems worse.
- If we think that mental illness is caused by problems, we might not get the right treatment.
- The stigma of illness can make people prefer spiritual explanations, which can hurt their chances of getting better.
- If we delay treatment for depression, it can get worse and more serious which can have serious consequences.
- We need to address this problem without criticizing people's beliefs; we need to find a way to integrate professional help.

#### **6.5 Ideological Legitimation of Patriarchal Structures**

Feminist scholars have shown how religious institutions have been used to justify the

subordination of women. When patriarchal family structures are presented as divinely ordained it can be hard for women to challenge them.

- Religious justifications for gender hierarchy can make it hard for women to question the structures that cause their suffering.
- The idea that women will be rewarded in the life if they comply with patriarchal norms can make them less likely to challenge these norms.
- Women who internalize these ideas might feel guilty or ashamed when they feel angry or want to change their situation.
- Historically the regulation of behaviour has been used to maintain caste hierarchy in Indian society.

#### **6.6 Unequal Access to Spiritual Benefits**

The positive effects of practice are not available to all Indian women equally. Some structural factors can prevent women from accessing these benefits.

- Dalit women have been excluded from Hindu temples and denied access to spiritual resources.
- Women who are poor or work jobs might not have the time or leisure to practice spirituality.
- Women in areas might not have access to the same spiritual resources as women in urban areas.
- Women who are not educated might not be able to engage with spiritual texts and find empowering interpretations.
- The risk is that spiritual practice can become another area where existing

inequalities are reproduced and justified.

## **7. Synthesis: Conditions That Determine Psychological Outcome**

The analysis we did earlier shows that spiritual practice is not always good or always bad for women's mental health. It depends on the conditions. Understanding these conditions has implications for clinical and policy decisions.

### **7.1 Autonomy and Intrinsic Motivation.**

The important factor in determining whether spiritual practice helps or hurts a woman's mental health is her relationship to the practice. If she chooses to do it because she wants to it can be helpful. If she is forced to do it it can be harmful.

### **7.2 Integration with Active Rather Than Passive Coping**

practice that helps women solve problems and take action can be more beneficial than practice that makes them passive and resigned.

### **7.3 Quality and Gender Dynamics of The Spiritual Community**

Not all spiritual communities are helpful. Those that are hierarchical and patriarchal can make woman's problems worse. Communities that are mutual and supportive can help women feel better.

### **7.4 A Meaning Framework That Preserves Agency.**

frameworks that make women feel like they have control and agency can be healthier, than those that make them feel passive or to blame for their problems.

### **7.5 Coexistence with Professional Psychological Support**

We need to find a way to combine practice with professional help to really support Indian women's

mental health.

The best outcome happens when spiritual practice and professional psychological care work together. Women who combine engagement with professional support are likely to benefit from both. Clinicians who respect their clients' spiritual lives can help them get the most out of this combination.

## **8. DISCUSSION**

### **8.1 Implications for Clinical Psychology**

The point of this paper is simple: spiritual practice should be considered a standard part of psychological assessments for adult Indian women. This means asking women about their practices and how they relate to them. Clinicians should understand the concept of bypassing, where people use spiritual beliefs to avoid dealing with difficult emotions. Therapists should help clients feel safe enough to express their emotions and work through them.

Clinicians need to understand the frameworks their clients use. This includes knowing the difference between karma yoga and passive fatalism or between bhakti and spiritual bypassing. This is not too much to ask; it is a requirement for cultural competence.

### **8.2 Implications for Community Mental Health**

The analysis suggests that spiritual communities can be used to promote health and provide early intervention. Women's Satsang groups, bhajan communities and temple volunteer networks already provide support. With facilitation and training these spaces can also provide education about depression and anxiety reduce stigma and refer women to professional services.

This must be done carefully with respect for the community. The risk of using these communities to deliver mental health messages is real and would be counterproductive. The effective models are those developed with the community not imposed on them.

### **8.3 Directions for Future Empirical Research**

This paper is theoretical. The model it proposes needs to be tested. The following research directions are suggested:

- Validation research: study the relationship between practice and measures of rumination, helplessness and role stress in diverse samples.
- Mechanism testing: examine whether attentional control, meaning-making, social support and locus of control mediate the relationship between practice and target constructs.
- Moderation analyses: examine whether autonomy, community quality and spiritual framework moderate the effects.
- Experimental studies: test whether contemplative practice interventions produce changes in ruminative response style or helplessness orientation.
- Qualitative research: develop accounts of how Indian women understand the psychological role of their spiritual practices.
- Longitudinal designs: track changes in target constructs over time with follow-up assessments to examine durability.

## **9. SITUATING THE ARGUMENT:**

## **COMPLEXITY AND DIVERSITY**

Any paper that talks about 'Indian women' as a single category faces a problem: there is nothing. There are hundreds of millions of women with social locations, shaped by caste, class, religion, language, region, generation, marital status and education. Their relationships to practice family role stress and psychological distress are shaped by these locations.

This paper has spoken in generalizations. These should be understood as starting points for more differentiated inquiry. The theoretical framework is intended to generate hypotheses for research with populations not to substitute for such research.

Several dimensions of diversity deserve emphasis. Caste is central to the psychology of practice in India. A Brahmin woman's relationship to a Vaishnava temple is different from a Dalit woman's relationship to the institution. Any research that does not attend to caste is incomplete and irresponsible.

Religious diversity adds complexity. The spiritual practices of Muslim, Sikh, Christian and Hindu women may share features. Differ fundamentally in their theological content and gender politics. Cross-religious comparison requires frameworks that attend to these differences.

The rural divide in access to contemplative traditions is significant. The spiritual life of Indian women is shaped by different institutional structures, community dynamics and relationships to religious authority and remains understudied.

## **10. CONCLUSION**

This paper started by considering the role of prayer

and spiritual engagement. It has tried to take that image thinking carefully about what it might mean and do. The result is a framework that presents two perspectives: that structured spiritual practice can be a source of psychological sustenance for Indian women and that spiritual practice can reinforce patterns of distress under different conditions.

The four mechanisms proposed provide a culturally situated account of how these protective effects operate. The five conditions identified provide a guide for distinguishing protective from harmful forms of practice. The deeper argument is that the devotional lives of women are psychologically significant and psychology failure to take them seriously is an intellectual and practical failure.

Women come to rooms having already attempted spiritual solutions to their distress. They live in communities that interpret their suffering through frameworks. They find meaning, support and agency through practice. Psychology needs to engage with this reality with sophistication and cultural honesty. Women need a psychology that can respect the significance of practice while remaining honest, about its limitations. This paper has tried to model what such a psychology might look like. The empirical work now needs to follow.

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