

Emotional Intelligence in the Indian Context

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5

6 **Abstract**

7 Emotional Intelligence by now does not need any introduction. Its importance and relevance
8 in various fields is being scientifically researched and asserted. Yet, the cross-cultural relevance
9 of the concept still remains an unexplored area. This paper analyses Mayer and Salovey's
10 ?ability model? against the background of Indian culture through the Bhagavad-Gita. It
11 explores the similarities and draws parallel to the emotionally intelligent person as surmised
12 by Mayer and Salovey, and the ?Sthithapragnya? as described by Lord Krishna in the
13 Bhagavad- Gita.

14

15 **Index terms**— emotional intelligence; cross-cultural; bhagavad-gita; stithapragnya; ability model.

16 **1 Introduction**

17 motional intelligence (EI), perhaps one of the most popular and the most researched psychological constructs of
18 the 21 st century (Ashkanasy, 2003;Bar-On 2006), emphasizes on the role of emotions in an individual's success or
19 failure in workplace and in life. Popularized by Goleman (1995), the concept of EI has inspired applied research
20 in every field be it management, academics, life sciences or psychology. Though there are many definitions and
21 constructs which classify the skills pertaining to emotional intelligence, three models have been recognized as
22 widely used and accepted ones ??Sharma et. al One of the definitions of EI is, it is "? the ability to perceive
23 accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate
24 thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to
25 promote emotional and intellectual growth" (Mayer and Salovey, 1997).

26 Mayer and Salovey's four branch model of EI focuses on emotional perception, emotional assimilation,
27 understanding and management (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004). The skills are assessed by the 'Multifactor
28 Emotional Intelligence Scale' (MEIS). To date, this is the only model that takes on a purely cognitive approach.
29 In contrast, Reuven Bar-On (2002) agrees on the qualities of emotional self awareness, self-actualization,
30 interpersonal relationship, reality testing, stress tolerance, optimism, happiness, etc. as those that decide the
31 emotional intelligence of a person. Goleman (1998) on the other hand points out to emotional self awareness, self
32 control, empathy, problem solving, conflict management, leadership, etc. as the characteristics of an emotionally
33 intelligent person. The mixed ability model proposed by Reuven Bar-On emphasizes on how the personality
34 traits influence a person's general well being and Goleman's model focuses on workplace success (Stys & Brown,
35 2004). Goleman's model is measured by the Emotional Competency Inventory (ECI) (Boyatzis et. al., 2000)
36 and Bar-On's model is assessed with the Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i) ??1997). As a fresh concept
37 with only twenty years of history, the theoretical models have not concentrated much on the cross-cultural
38 aspect of emotions (Sharma et. al., 2009). Culture plays a significant role in deciding a person's response
39 to any given situation and it has been recognized that basic psychological processes depend on socio-cultural
40 practices and meanings (Triandis, 2000). Broadly speaking, culture can be distinguished under two branches -the
41 collectivist and the individualist (Srivastava, et. al., 2008). In a collectivist culture, individuals see themselves
42 as interdependent with their groups (family, friends, society, tribe, country, etc.), whereas in an individualist
43 culture, people are independent and give more importance to personal goals and personal needs. The Asian
44 countries generally fall under the collectivist culture, and North America, Australia, and New Zealand, to name
45 a few, are categorized under the individualist culture. Explicit expression of strong feelings like anger, love,

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46 frustration etc. are considered as uncouth and are restrained in public in collectivistic cultures, but the same is
47 considered essential in individualistic cultures. The way people perceive and exhibit emotions varies according
48 to their cultural background. What applies to one culture will be an anomaly to the other. Thus, it becomes
49 imperative to study the concept of EI from the perspective of different cultures of the world and see whether it
50 can be applied universally. This paper in particular approaches the concept of emotional intelligence from the
51 Indian perspective of emotions.

52 Emotional Intelligence is a concept that is not new to the Indian reader. Though there is hardly any serious
53 research on EI from the Indian perspective (Sharma, 2012), anyone who has read through the ancient Indian
54 literature will be aware that EI is embedded in every text. The Indian philosophic tradition stresses on the
55 powerful nature of emotions, which have to be harnessed for a harmonious life. References to the description and
56 functions of the human mind can be found in the Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, and the texts of Ayurveda. Patanjali,
57 who is considered to be the 'Father of Indian Psychology', had done a systematic, thorough research on the
58 mysteries of human mind, thousands of years ahead of the western study (Tattwamayananda, 1994). Though the
59 Indian philosophy has a religious strain which focuses or guides an individual in turning his mind on the Supreme
60 Being, a careful study will reveal the fact that it is perfectly attuned to the down-toearth needs of the present
61 world as well (Engardio and McGregor, 2006). Hinduism is more a way of life than a religion and combines in it
62 the fundamental principles of social, political and economic life.

63 Education in ancient India molded the students to envisage a world beyond any physical boundaries. It
64 promoted unity and social responsibility encouraging them to respect everyone as equals, without any distinction.
65 As the Rig Veda says, "Samāni va akutih samānā hridayāni vah samānam astu vo mano yathā vah susahāsatī".

66 ("One be the aim of all your activities. Alike be your desires and intentions. May a sense of unity be your
67 guide")

68 The education helped the students have an incisive and a comprehensive view of life. Including death as a part
69 of life enabled the individual to distinguish clearly between the material and the moral, the permanent and the
70 impermanent. Knowing that this material world is impermanent prepared the mind for higher planes of thought.
71 The Indian philosophy believes in 'Karma' which holds a person accountable for all his actions. The nature of his
72 actions decides whether he attains eternal bliss or is reborn in this material world to face another cycle of life. To
73 escape the struggles of this impermanent materialistic world becomes the aim of life for which self realization is
74 crucial. A selfrealized individual understood life's struggles as trivial compared to the inner struggle for control
75 over one's mind and thoughts. Thus, an individual's mind was prepared to encounter the challenges of achieving
76 inner peace and tranquility. The Vedas and the Upanishads focus on this need for emotional stability which helps
77 an individual tide over the many battles of life (internal and external). The recent theory of emotional intelligence
78 also stresses on the need for emotional regulation for success in life. This paper compares the modern theory of
79 emotional intelligence as proposed by Salovey and Mayer, with the idea of emotional stability as expressed in the
80 Bhagavad-Gita (a part of the great Indian epic 'Mahabharata'), a text which has influenced people across cultures
81 (Algeo, 2000). It mainly focuses on the second chapter of the Bhagavad-Gita, as it is beyond the scope of this
82 paper to discuss all the eighteen chapters. Though there are significant similarities between the 'ability model' of
83 EI and the idea of emotional stability as advocated by the Bhagavad-Gita, one can see that the Bhagavad-Gita
84 takes a more comprehensive view.

85 2 II. The Bhagavad-Gita

86 The Bhagavad-Gita (the Divine song), considered to be the fifth Veda is Lord Krishna's moral guidance to Arjuna
87 on the battle field. It is considered to be the essence of the four Vedas (Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva) (Robinson,
88 2005;Easwaran, 1985). The Vedas are Hindu religious texts which include hymns, incantations, religious rituals
89 and sacrificial rites (Goodall, 1996). The Bhagavad-Gita gives the core message of the Vedas in a pragmatic way,
90 thus being a more practical document than the Vedas (Jeste and Vahia, 2008). "?Horror and doubt distract His
91 troubled thoughts, and from the bottom stir The hell within him; for within him Hell He brings, and round about
92 him, nor from Hell One step, no more than from Himself, can fly By change of place?" (Paradise Lost, Book IV,
93 Lines 18-23)

94 As Satan flies out of hell to avenge himself, one wonders how he could fly away from hell. When God had
95 banished him away from heaven, how could he come back? But does Satan escape Hell? Milton explains Satan's
96 curse beautifully -"The Hell within him; for within him Hell?" The real hell is within him, in his mind, his
97 thoughts. Where can he fly away from himself? Unless the change, the repentance comes from within, there is
98 no escape. As Milton subtly points out to the power of mind over body, Krishna in Bhagavad-Gita is open about
99 his thoughts on the same. The background of Bhagavad-Gita is the Kurukshetra war where the first cousins
100 stand against each other when Arjuna, the warrior non-pareil loses his nerve and refuses to fight. His mind is a
101 cauldron of emotions gripped with the moral dilemma of to do or not to do. Even as Arjuna struggles to accept
102 the fact that he has to fight his own kith and kin, his guru and his childhood friends, Krishna admonishes his
103 lack of mental strength and points out to the supremacy of people who have absolute control over their mind, are
104 focused on their duty and are unperturbed by neither pain nor pleasure. yam hi na vyathayanthyethe purusham
105 purusharshabha samaduhkha sukham dheeram somruthathvaya kalpathe (In Sanskrit)

106 That calm man who is the same in pain and pleasure, whom these cannot disturb, alone is able, O great
107 amongst men, to attain to immortality. (Swami Swarupananda, 1996).

108 (Bhagavad-Gita, Ch. II, ??loka 15) Following this is an active, spontaneous conversation between Krishna
109 and Arjuna, which throws light on the supremacy of knowledge, bhakthi (devotion) and selfless action. Krishna
110 simplifies the philosophy of life as it can be understood and practised by even laymen who do not have any formal
111 education.

112 **3 III.**

113 Emotional Intelligence and The Bhagavad-Gita

114 The Mahabharata is the epic saga of conflict between the Kauravas and the Pandavas. It is a text which can
115 be understood and interpreted at different levels. On the superficial level, it is the clash for power. But, on a
116 higher plane, it is the war between 'Dharma' and 'Adharma' -the right and the wrong. The opening verse of
117 Bhagavad-Gita begins as 'Dharmakshetre Kurukshetre' -Dharmakshetre' -where 'Dharma' was established and
118 'Kurukshetre' -where the 'Kurus' fought. 'Kshetra' meaning 'field' can be understood in two levels -the physical
119 topographical place where the war takes place, and also the 'mind' of every human being. The war at Kurukshetra
120 is can be taken as symbolic of the struggle which every individual faces in varying degrees at various stages of
121 his life.

122 The Pandavas having been stripped of their wealth and kingdom through guile and deceit are left with no
123 option but to fight their own brothers and grandsire. The Pandava army rests its hopes on the valour of worthy
124 Arjuna, whose military skills have no match. The war is about to begin and Arjuna asks Krishna (his divine
125 charioteer) to take the chariot to a place from where he can see all those assembled against him in war. As he
126 sees his gurus Drona and Kripa, his beloved grandsire Bhishma and his brothers the Kauravas, he falters and is
127 gripped with misery. He refuses to fight saying he does not see any gain or happiness in the kingdom he gains by
128 killing his own brothers. The Kurukshetra war is thus synonymous with the complex circumstances a person faces
129 in his/her life. The fear, anxiety, misgiving, and desperation of the person is symbolized in Arjuna's predicament.
130 As Arjuna battles with his emotional turmoil, the reader gets an insight into an emotionally disturbed person's
131 struggle for clarity of thought and action. Krishna's guidance to Arjuna gives a practical solution to emerge out
132 of this struggle unscathed.

133 One can see striking similarities between Krishna's emotionally stable person (Sthithapragnya) and Mayer and
134 Salovey's emotionally intelligent person. Mayer and Salovey's 'ability model' (2004) identifies four stages through
135 which a person becomes emotionally intelligent -? Emotional Perception ? Emotional Assimilation ? Emotional
136 Understanding and ? Emotional Management

137 The first step -emotional perception -is an ability to be self-aware of emotions and to express them accurately.
138 When a person is aware of the emotions he is experiencing, he moves on to the next level emotional assimilation,
139 which is to distinguish between the different emotions he is undergoing and also identify those emotions that
140 affect his thought process. This ability leads him to -emotional understanding -an ability to understand complex
141 emotions and also to recognize the transition from one emotion to another. By then he becomes adept in
142 dealing with his emotions and thus is able to manage his emotions by connecting to or disconnecting from
143 any emotion at any given situation. This gives him complete control over his impulses and is thus able to
144 think, analyze and behave rationally in any situation. The first two stages are when a person identifies and
145 becomes aware of his own and others' emotions and the awareness leading to a better judgment of the situation
146 he is in and its consequences. Though the Bhagavad-Gita does not speak of this fundamental requirement of
147 emotional intelligence, it stresses on the effectiveness of being able to control and manage emotions, (i.e.) the
148 third and fourth stages. The reason being Arjuna has already satisfied the preconditions as he is aware of his
149 emotional turmoil and clearly spells out his predicament to Krishna. He perfectly understands his misgivings
150 and seeks Krishna's help to overcome them. The slokas (verses) four to eight of the second chapter of the
151 Bhagavad-Gita bring out the anguish of Arjuna in his own words. karpanyadosopahatasvabhavah prchhami
152 tvam dharmasammudhacetah yacchreyah syanniscitam bruhi tanme sisyate ham sadhi mam tvam prapannam (In
153 Sanskrit) With my nature overpowered by weak commiseration, with a mind in confusion about duty, I supplicate
154 Thee. Say decidedly what is good for me. I am Thy disciple. Instruct me who have taken refuge in Thee. (Swami
155 Swarupananda, 1996) na mamapanudyadyacchokamuccchosanamindriyanam avapya bhumavasapatnamrddham
156 rajyam suranamapi cadhipatyam (In Sanskrit) I do not see anything to remove this sorrow which blasts my
157 senses, even were I to obtain unrivalled and flourishing dominion over the earth, and mastery over the gods.
158 (Swami Swarupananda, 1996) (Bhagavad-Gita, Ch. II. ??lokas 7,8) prapasyami hi

159 We clearly see that Arjuna has what we can call the qualifying qualities of an emotionally intelligent person
160 -emotional perception and assimilation. The precise words chosen by him effectively convey his state of mind.
161 He says that his nature is overpowered by 'weak commiseration'. He commiserates with himself for being in a
162 place where he has to fight his own dear ones. He feels pity for his cousins who have brought their entire clan to
163 this sorrowful state. But he also realizes that this commiseration is a weak one, one that weakens and confuses
164 him against doing or even deciding on what his duty is, and thus supplicates to Krishna to guide him, advice
165 him on the right course of action. It is in response to this does Krishna discuss in length the need for emotional
166 management. It is interesting to note at this juncture that Krishna does not merely stress on effective emotional
167 management but first spells out the reasons that lead to emotional disturbances and then moves on to the ways
168 of dealing with them. Krishna offers a systematic analysis of the problem at hand and a solution as well. Thus

169 Krishna's advice becomes more practical. The course of action that he advises Arjuna is one that can be followed
 170 by anyone at any place. The guidance is universal in nature and holds meaning even to present day life.

171 Tracing the root cause of all emotional turmoil, Krishna identifies desire and anger as the two vices
 172 that lead an individual to his downfall. *dhyayato visayanpumsah sangastesupajayate sangatsanjayate kamah*
 173 *kamatkrodho'bhijayate* (In Sanskrit) Thinking of objects, attachment to them is formed in a man. From
 174 attachment longing, and from longing anger grows. *kroddhadbhavati sammohah sammohatsmrtivibhantamah*
 175 *smrtibhramsdabuddhinaso buddhinasatpranasyati* (in Sanskrit) From anger comes delusion, and from delusion
 176 loss of memory. From loss of memory comes the ruin of discrimination, and from the ruin of discrimination, he
 177 perishes. (Swami Swarupananda, 1996).

178 (Bhagavad-Gita, Ch. II, Slokas 62, 63) It is the strong desire for and attachment to the worldly objects that
 179 drives an individual to his downfall. Desire when not satisfied leads to anger, which in turn leads to delusion.
 180 This further destroys the ability to discriminate which leads to complete ruin. Examples of those who fell to
 181 disgrace because of their desire, abound -Macbeth, Dr.Faustus, Satan, Icarus, to name a few. Macbeth, a brave
 182 warrior charts his own doom as he is swayed by the desire of becoming the King. He has no compunctions in
 183 murdering the unsuspecting King who visits his castle. Though he does ascend the throne it is one wrought with
 184 guilt and misgivings, that at the end Macbeth is actually happy to die in the battlefield. He feels so relieved from
 185 the life of guilt. Dr.Faustus' blunder is no less as he is willingly sells his soul to the devil for gaining name and
 186 fame. The terrible consequence of his act is not realized by him until the end. When the realization dawns, it is
 187 too late. Satan falls down to eternal doom as he is overcome by the desire to become God. Icarus' fall (literal
 188 and metaphorical) is because of his desire to reach greater heights than he is actually capable of. The Indian
 189 literature equally focuses on the great heroes who fell to disgrace because of their attachment and desire which
 190 lead to ruinous anger. To take an example from the great epic 'Ramayana', Ravana the demon king was a great
 191 scholar and a great devotee of Lord Shiva. He was well versed in Vedas and also a great astrologer. His expertise
 192 in statecraft was recognized even by his opponents. Lord Rama instructs his brother Lakshmana to learn the
 193 art of statecraft from the dying emperor after the war. How could such an erudite, scholarly, wise emperor fail
 194 to defeat a motley army of monkeys? It was his lust and desire for Sita, Rama's wife that lead him to his ruin.
 195 His desire blinded his wisdom. He lost his power of discrimination. He failed to realize that abducting another
 196 man's wife against her wishes was a great sin which would eventually destroy him and his kingdom. His power
 197 of reasoning vanishes as he is gripped with desire and lust. Thus, it becomes evident that desire leads a man
 198 to his ruin however great he might be. The lessons that can be taken from the life of these heroes stress on the
 199 need for overcoming desire, lust and anger. The Bhagavad-Gita thus moves a step forward of the theory of EI
 200 and outlines what leads to a loss of discrimination, and cautions the individual.

201 The Bhagavad-Gita refers to the emotionally intelligent person as a 'Sthithapragnya' (the emotionally stable
 202 person). As Arjuna asks Krishna who a stithapragnya is, Krishna describes the nature and qualities of a
 203 stithapragnya in detail. *sthitaprajnasya ka bhasa samadhishthaya kesava sthitadhi kim prabhaseta kimasita*
 204 *vrajeta kim* (In Sanskrit) What, O Kesava, is the description of a man of steady wisdom, merged in Samadhi?
 205 How (on the other hand) does the man of steady wisdom speak, how sit, how walk? (Swami Swarupananda,
 206 1996).

207 (Bhagavad-Gita, Ch. II, Sloka 54) Krishna answers him in twenty one slokas (55 -72) discussing in detail
 208 the qualities of an emotionally stable person. He whose mind is not shaken by adversity, who does not hanker
 209 after happiness, who has become free from affection, fear, and wrath, is indeed the Muni of steady wisdom. *yah*
 210 *sarvatranabhisnehastattatprapya subhasubham nabhinandati na dvesti tasya prajna pratisthita* (In Sanskrit)
 211 He who is everywhere unattached, not pleased at receiving good, nor vexed at evil, his wisdom is fixed. *yada*
 212 *samharate cayam kurmo'nganiva sarvasah indriyanindriyarthebhyastasya prajna pratiathita* (In Sanskrit) When
 213 also, like the tortoise drawing its limbs, he can completely withdraw the senses from their objects, then his
 214 wisdom becomes steady. (Swami Swarupananda, 1996).

215 (Bhagavad-Gita, Ch. II, Slokas 56,57& 58.)

216 A stithapragnya according to Krishna is one who remains unperturbed in the face of calamity, and takes
 217 good or evil with equanimity. He is neither happy when something good happens, nor is he affected when things
 218 go against him. This does not mean that he lacks sensitivity. He has the ability to keep his emotions in check
 219 and the skill of withdrawing his feelings away from the object of pleasure or pain. Even as a tortoise withdraws
 220 its head and legs inside the protective cover of its shell whenever it faces danger, so does an emotionally stable
 221 person withdraw all his emotions and feelings within himself and remains unperturbed. He has the power to
 222 emotionally attach or detach from any situation, at his will. This is not far from what Mayer and Salovey list as
 223 the skills pertaining to the fourth branch of their 'ability model' (Salovey, Mayer & Caruso, 2002).

224 ? Ability to be open to feelings, both pleasant and unpleasant ? Ability to monitor and reflect on emotions ?
 225 Ability to engage, prolong, or detach from an emotional state ? Ability to manage emotions in oneself, and the
 226 ? Ability to manage emotions in others

227 The difference between Krishna and the proponents of the theory of EI is that Krishna takes a more
 228 comprehensive view of the problem. He studies the cause, discusses the effect and also offers the means of
 229 encountering the problem successfully. Having identified the cause of all emotional distress, he identifies the
 230 qualities of an emotionally stable person and completes the circle by advocating the medicine for the ailment.

231 One of the greatest hurdles of EI is whether it can be successfully imparted, and if so what would be the best

232 method. Though there are innumerable training centers and courses which promise to enhance the emotional
233 intelligence of an individual, the question that looms large is, are they really effective, and if so, are they universally
234 applicable irrespective of time place and culture. On the other hand, Krishna's answer to the problem is universal
235 and is applicable to any individual of any place or culture. It is simple and practical.

236 To achieve emotional stability, Krishna shows the path of 'Nishkama Karma' -action with detachment to the
237 outcome or result of the action. As it was seen earlier, emotional instability stems from attachment to and a
238 longing for the desired object. So Krishna's advice is to detach oneself from the fruits of one's action.

239 karmanyevadhikaraste ma phalesu kadacana ma karmaphalaheturbhuma te sango'stvakarmani (In Sanskrit)
240 Thy right is to work only; but never to the fruits thereof. Be thou not the producer of the fruits of (thy) actions;
241 neither let thy attachment be towards inaction. The wise, possessed of this evenness of mind, abandoning the
242 fruits of their actions, freed for ever from the fetters of birth, go to that state which is beyond all evil. (Swami
243 Swarupananda, 1996) (Bhagavad-Gita, Ch. II, Slokas 47-51) Krishna points out that action without desire, action
244 that does not bind the doer with the outcome is the right kind of action. When an individual acts for the sake of
245 action, because it is the right thing to do, and does not fear the result, then his mind remains unfettered. Taking
246 the example of Arjuna himself, Arjuna was worried about fighting his cousins because he was worried about the
247 outcome. He was upset because he found no gain or happiness in winning the war. He did not want to fight
248 because there was no positive result for him at the end of the war. Winning he loses, losing he gains nothing.
249 If on the other hand, Arjuna does not think or worry about what is to happen after the war, but proceeds with
250 the fight because it is his duty as a kshatriya to fight when called upon, then there is no confusion or emotional
251 turmoil. He does what has been expected of him, not what is convenient or productive. This 'Nishkama Karma'
252 has a dual effect. It frees the doer from the emotional imbroglio of worrying about the outcome and also frees
253 him from the responsibility of the outcome as well. It is a liberating feeling which annihilates any negative
254 thoughts or emotions. When the mind is free from negative emotions, it calms down and a calm, tranquil
255 mind is the fountain head of all things positive. It is with a stamp of authority that Krishna declares, prasade
256 sarvaduhkhanam hanirasyopajayate prasannacetaso hyasu buddhih paryavatisthate (In Sanskrit)

257 In tranquility, all sorrow is destroyed. For the intellect in him, who is tranquil minded is soon established in
258 firmness. (Swami swarupananda, 1996).

259 (Bhagavad-Gita, Ch.II, Sloka 65). This is the desired end towards which the proponents of emotional
260 intelligence are working.

261 4 IV.

262 5 Conclusion

263 Bhagavad-Gita is a text which has influenced many thinkers from east and west alike. The lessons that can
264 be taken from this divine exposition on the philosophy of life are boundless. Recent research has linked many
265 concepts of management to the Bhagavad-Gita. As one commentator of the Bhagavad-Gita points out, it is a
266 text which speaks of many things at different levels (Das, Sita pati). It is a 'complete' text -Purnam -as one says
267 in Sanskrit. To quote the same pundit, "We can continue to discuss and inquire about Bhagavadgita unlimitedly,
268 and never find the end of its ability to produce the most profound realizations about life, the universe, and the
269 purpose and the person behind them." This paper is but a drop in the ocean trying to find similarity of thought
270 between the theory of EI and the Bhagavad-Gita. The prospects are innumerable which will help researchers
271 perfect the theory of emotional intelligence. ^{1 2 3 4}

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Figure 1:

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