



Indian Perspective towards Emotional Intelligence

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Abstract

'Emotional intelligence' is a term introduced by western psychology and is widely acclaimed and considered as a new dimension to the concept of ability mapping. It is scientifically accepted that cultural traditions and the philosophy of life that constructs its foundation play a dominant role in shaping and nurturing one's emotional world. Oriental cultures, especially Indian philosophical scriptures hold a huge repertoire of such knowledge and practice which tries to alter the emotional world of a person towards the larger social good. The current study aims to probe into the major constructs referring to emotions and their correlates as perceived through Indian philosophical writings and explore their concurrence with the modern day model of emotional intelligence. The method used for it has been primarily review of scriptures (ex. Bhagwat Geeta, Taittiriya Upanishad, write ups from Saint Literature, etc), research articles by Indian scholars, and connecting it with examples of some actual present day practices. The study brings up interesting concepts in Indian philosophy and spiritual literature like Panchkosa (five sheaths of personality), Nava Rasa (Nine shades of emotions), Sukha- Dukkha vivek (discerning pleasure and pain), Daivee Sampatee (positive virtues as wealth), Sthitapradnya Darshan (the seeker with steady wisdom), Atmasamvaad (Self Dialogue), Indriya Nigraha, (controlling sensual desires) which illuminate us on the broader concept of lifelong emotional development. Thus the Indian view towards emotional intelligence covers not only the sensory and impulse level controls but it also beholds that every person is potentially divine and complete. Unfolding of the emotional capacities in a systematic and well directed manner can lead to the state of YOG (integration of body and mind).

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence; Indian Perspective

Introduction

Emotions are an integral part of our life. Emotions can be interpreted as 'E-motion' i.e. something that enhances or triggers motion. Most of our thoughts and actions have an emotional base. They are like the salt that brings taste to food when in proper proportion and ruin the flavour if put disproportionately. They influence our cognition, our decisions, our reactions and our social interactions. Emotions

have both physiological and cognitive components. Various theories have been proposed in an attempt to understand them. The theories emphasizing the physiological components like James Lange or Cannon-Bard and there are theories highlighting the cognitive components like the one by Schacter and there are still others, which acknowledge the role of both physiological as well as cognitive components. There are valence/ arousal dimensions discussed in depth and also there are the cognitive appraisal theories. In

addition, there is the social-constructionist view-point. A wide range of emotions have been studied and described in terms of physiological responses, accompanying cognitions and associated environmental events [1]. All this shows the deep interest of people in understanding the complex yet interesting interplay of emotions.

Feeling is the basic component of emotions popularly termed as affect. It is the most complex component and cannot be understood by analysing emotions into parts. This experiential aspect has been central to the Indian approach in understanding human nature. The term “affect” focuses on the subjective experiential aspects of emotions as against the physiological changes and behavior accompanying

emotions. “Affect” as a feature and function of the “person” and the nature of one who experiences it, has been the focus of Indian tradition of understanding human nature.

The East and the West

The two main cultural streams as we see are the western individualistic and the eastern collectivist. As mentioned above, emotions are product of the interaction between the ego and the true self on background of the outside world as felt and interpreted by the individual. In a nut shell, these two streams can be compared with respect to concept of self which in turn influences the experience and expression of emotions to a large extent [2].

	Individualistic	Collectivist
1	Independent self, distinct than the cosmos (Creator), emotions perceived as singular events situated within individual	Interdependent self ,in union with the cosmos, emotions perceived as exchanges between individuals
2	Individual centric world view, want to influence others	Biological, organic, holistic view of life, engage in dialectical thinking
3	Knowledge used as a means of controlling others to seek power, personalized control	Sacred, liberative view of knowledge, social individualism, distributed notion of control
4	Describe psychological well-being in terms of high arousal positive states ,excitement, elation	Feeling of calmness, other low arousal positive states preferred,
5	Life satisfaction is more dependent on ‘self-esteem’	Life satisfaction more dependent on relational harmony
6	Individual centric locus of control	Shared locus of control
7	Success: individual achievements of primary importance	Success: sharing concern for others a primary concern

When we look at this basic difference in the concept and expression of self in the two cultures it is obvious that one cannot compare these two models directly from same platform as they need to be interpreted in corresponding contexts. Interpretations of situations and consequently triggered emotional responses one gives to them are also dependent on this concept of self which is shaped in that socio-psychological ambience. The ‘appropriateness’ of these expressions also differs with this ambience. There may be considerable embellishment of “basic” (that is, universally “hardwired”) expressions and elaborate differences in preferred courses of action, plans, and strategies. And, of course, different cultures will often describe their emotions quite differently-use different metaphors, different names. The language of emotions, the way they are talked about, and the ways in which they fit (or do not fit) into a culture’s ethics and customs may vary enormously, and there will be any number of encouraging and discouraging features of the culture and the environment that will provoke, support,

excite, suppress, or possibly even extinguish certain emotions or types of emotion [3,4], through his experiment of facial action coding system (FACS), tracked the facial muscle activity as perceived by different peoples in photographs shown. He observed that the recognition rates differed for different individuals. It was later stated that though feelings are universal, and people have common evolutionary heritage, they tend to adapt to their environments and their emotions can become malleable or culturally variable.

Emotions from the Indian Viewpoint

The ‘Rasas’: The Indian literature sees emotions in form of ‘Rasas’ which give rise to certain ‘Bhavas’. Just as modern psychology identifies six basic emotions, Indian viewpoint identifies nine ‘Rasas’ along with the coexisting Bhavas’. Which bring life to our thoughts and actions? They ‘Navarasas’ with their corresponding ‘Bhavas’ are as given below:

RASA	BHAVA	MEANING
Shringar (Erotic)	Rati (love)	Delight
Hasya (Humorous)	Hasa (happiness)	Laughter
Karuna (Pathetic)	Shoka (sadness)	Sorrow
Raudra (Terrible)	Krodh (anger)	Anger
Veera (Heroic)	Utsaha	Heroism
Bhayanaka (Fearful)	Bhaya (fear, anxiety)	Fear
Bibhatsa (Odious)	Jugupsa (disgust)	Disgust
Adbhuta (Wonderous)	Vismaya (curiosity, surprise)	Wonder
Shanta (Peaceful)	Calm	Peace

Navarasa in Indian classical Dance Forms, Shubhasini Padmanathan

These Rasas can be corresponded to the six basic emotions as shown but they also involve the valence approach while including 'Utsaha' (heroism) and 'Shanta' (calm) in the list. Emotions here are seen as an outcome of the interaction between the ego ('ahamkara') and the true self ('atman'). It is also an experience that represents the relation between the ego and the outside world. Emotions are produce of the desires according to Indian thought and are viewed as springs of action and bi-polar in nature. The concepts of 'sukha' and 'dukha' (pleasure and pain) as the two opposites lie at the bottom of every emotion. The ratio of both these determines the valence and their role in each experience. The Indian concept of personality as discussed in the 'Panchkosa' model, involves emotions as a part of the 'Manomaya kosa' or the mind that influences both the food sheath ('Annamaya kosa') and the vital air sheath ('Pranamaya kosa') as evident from the physiological reactions accompanying them.

Emotions and their affective experiences are influenced by the intellect or the 'Vignanamaya kosa', the cognitive appraisal as proposed by Lazarus, as well as the 'Anandamaya kosa', the experiential aspect, or the bliss sheath [1]. As emotions originate from desires, they are universal, common to all mankind. However many times the perception and interpretations of experiences is embedded in cultural contexts which in turn can influence the experience of emotions in a varied sense. Though the basic six emotions or the Navrasa are common to all, the degree to which they are generated and/ or expressed is largely a product of the socialization process in specific culture.

The Indian Concept of Emotional Intelligence

The Indian reflections on emotional intelligence : the various aspects of emotional intelligence are spread over amply in Indian literature and practice discretely which one needs to identify and weave together to get a comprehensive overview. This view is not a homogeneous, segregated trait cluster but

it is discussed in the context of self and society ('Vyashti' and 'Samashtee') so as to achieve the fulfillment of duties towards other fellow beings. According to Indian thought emotional learning (influencing emotional intelligence) is a lifelong process, that which helps a person to look inwards.

Paralleling with Goleman's Model of EI

If we consider the five factors of EI as mentioned in Goleman's model, as a comparative mark for discussing the Indian perspective, some salient references come up for discussion specially for three aspects: Self-awareness and Self-control and Empathy.

Self-awareness: Self-awareness as described in Indian viewpoint emphasizes the understanding of the true self rather than just listing the strengths and weaknesses for achieving the mundane goals in life.

कः त्वं कोऽहं कुत आयातः I

का मे जननी को मे तातः II

इति परिभाषय सर्वमसारम् विश्वं त्यक्त्वा स्वप्न विचारम् II (Adi Shankaracharya)

Who are you? Who am I? Who is my mother? Who is my father? Enquire this, leaving aside the entire world of experience, lacking in essence and born of imagination. This verse introduces the inner urge of a seeker to understand the true nature of the self. The origin and the different abilities one inherits from the parents. It is also suggested that unless one dismisses the sense-passions from the mind and turn it towards a close observation of one's own subjective personality, one would not realize the hollowness of the world of name and form and the empty vanity of the life we live.

Another verse in Bhagwat Geeta, the gospel of Indian traditional wisdom, calls upon the conflict of two selves within. It points out that one is solely responsible for the upliftment or the decline of one's own fate as the mind alone is the friend of the self; and it alone is the foe of the self. And

thus one should raise the self. One should not allow the self to sink by a mind which is of the contrary kind.

उद्धरेदात्मनाऽऽत्मानं नात्मानमवसादयेत्।

आत्मैव ह्यात्मनो बन्धुरात्मैव रिपुरात्मनः॥ (The Bhagvat Geeta 6.5)

Here the 'Self' implies the supreme form of self 'Atman'. This verse triggers our thoughts regarding the unending search for the meaning of our existence. If a person starts the journey on this path, he/ she are bound to find out the mundane traits and abilities in one needed to bear the physical identity as a human being. Self-awareness in this sense is not only restricted to this deep drive for knowing the nature of self, but it also encompasses the analysis of ones though processes in a critical manner. Saint Ramdas - a legendary inspirational figure from the saint tradition in Maharashtra has beautifully described this need to be a self-observant and self-critical mind set ('Vichakshan') which makes a person more tuned with the supreme faith and thus with one's true nature ('Atman'). Manache Shlok- The chain of verses describing the complex nature of mind and how it can be reined with the help of a firm/ steadfast faith in Rama symbolizing the supreme power have consistently pointed towards the interplay of ego and emotions in gaining the true knowledge about the self.

कळेना कळेना कळेना कळेना I

गळेना गळेना अहंता गळेना II

This verse comments on a person's inability to overcome the rigidity in thought processes thus leading to misery, if a person does not understand the trap. Further he also says,

बहु हिंङता सौख्य होणार नाही

सिणावे परी नातुडे हित काही II

The need to look inwards for understanding the oscillating nature of emotions is expressed as the emotions leading to unnecessary attraction and lust for consuming pleasure can lead to extortion.

To overcome this hurdle, he says,

तुटे वाद संवाद तेथे करावा I

विवेके अहंभाव हा पालटावा II

Only when a person initiates dialogue with the self and critically assesses ones thoughts and emotions, he/ she

can possibly eliminate the inflated/ unwanted expression of ego which hinders one from getting sanctity in life. What else does Albert Ellis point out when he talks of the rational emotions?

Self-Control: Self-Control is the second factor described by Goleman D [5] as a constituent of emotional intelligence. Indian tradition not just expects this from a self-actualizing person but embeds it in the way of life (Dharma: Dharayiti iti dharma: Religion is that which beholds the life). The ten marked expressions of Dharma are mentioned as:

धृतिः क्षमा दमोऽस्तेयं शौचमिन्द्रियनिग्रहः।

धीर्विद्या सत्यमक्रोधो दशकं धर्मलक्षणम्॥ (मनुस्मृति ६.१२)

Dhruti- Patience (steadiness), Kshama-forgiveness (also to be thankful to your benefactor), Dum (always being engaged in religion with patience), Asta (not stealing), Shouch- elimination/ catharsis (purity of inner and outside self), Nigraha-(sensory control), Dhi (enhancing intelligence from Satkarm-good deeds), Vidya (taking real knowledge), Satyam (always conducting truth), and non-aggression (always leaving anger and staying silent) are always the true indicators so as to impart knowledge i.e. Dharmacharan). All these related to varied dimensions of self-control: thoughts, feelings and expressions.

There are ample reflections of the concept of self-control in Indian literature which directly appeals for its execution in day to day life. It says that the realization of the chain of hedonism-pleasure-happiness - satisfaction is essential for understanding the thin line separating short term pleasure and long term happiness. The following verse from Bhagvat Geeta shows how mind can be dragged astray with the force of organ related craving.

इन्द्रियाणाम हि चरतां यन्मनोऽनुविधीयते।

तदस्य हरति प्रज्ञां वायुर्नाविमिवाम्भसि II (The Bhagvat Geeta 2.67)

Once the sensual organs start demanding for pleasure, the intellect also is driven by their force as if a boat loses its control due to the fast blowing wind in a sea. So the very next verse explains the need for controlling these impulses by removing this knowledge killing lust for emotional and spiritual development. Bhagvat Geeta has numerous mentions how the discrimination between what is 'Sukha' (pleasure and what is 'Dukha' (pain) can be done. It says that only the rational (seeker) mind that controls the sensual pleasures and unnecessary emotional arousal as well as suppression can help in attaining emotional maturity through balance of attachment and detachment with worldly pains and pleasures.

Emotional intelligence as reflected in Indian perspective emphasizes on the management and regulation of sensual and emotional impulses. (The one who is in supreme control of them is the 'Jitendriya'). The foundation of mature personality is supposed to be emerging from this command over organ generated lust and a child as young as 9 years can start learning it after he/she undergoes the 'Upanayan' (the thread ceremony) as a sublime way of life. It is considered that the sensual lust and unnecessary rage eat up the moral strength. They are the real enemies.

काम एषः क्रोध एषः रजोगुण समुद्भवः।

महाशनो महापाप्मः विद्येनम इह वैरीणम ॥ (Bhagvat Geeta 3-37)

आवृतं ज्ञानमेतेन ज्ञानिनो नित्यवैरिणः ।

कामरूपेण कौन्तेय दुष्पूरेणानलेन च ॥

It also comments that knowledge is often clouded / masked by these enemies who can never be satisfied. Now the question arises as to how to attain control? The answer is through 'Yoga'. The root word of yoga is 'Yuj' (that which connects {body and mind}). It aims at the close monitoring and regulation of thoughts and feelings. For this one needs to concentrate on the inner world, focus on mind and body actions, and follow Yoga to clear the unwanted, undesirable, inappropriate emotional arousal. In Buddhist terminology the same is named as 'mindfulness' which helps a person to turn his inner eye upon the thoughts and emotions with the help of 'Jagrut buddhi' (enlightened intellect). According to it, the vital power of emotions often remains undiscovered. They can be converted for good. With little efforts emotions like fear, resentment, and irritation can be converted to objects of meditation. Instead of destructing passion, it can be given a context widening the cognitive skills and insights. Developing non reactivity is the aim of mindfulness. This enhances the control on ones impulses [6].

Empathy: Indian viewpoint towards this aspect of emotional intelligence is expressed through the concept of 'Karuna' (Compassion), 'Kshama' (Forgiving) and 'Anyony Bhav' (feeling of one ness with others). An example of this is seen in the Bhudan movement inspired and led by Vinobaji Bhave. Vinobaji, in his writings mentions that the difference between 'I wish for pleasure' and 'we wish for pleasure' indicates towards this 'Anyonya bhav' with the 'Samashtee' (the collective being). The tradition of 'Varee' in the saintly tradition: the journey of millions of devotees from Alandi to Pandharpur signifies this feeling of empathy on ground. The devotees call themselves as the part of the deity, they address each other by the name 'Mauli' (the mother: the one who creates) keeping in mind that inner bonding of common faith. The second example of such compassion is reflected in

the concept of Dan (giving away the worldly treasures). The nobility and compassionate nature of King Harishchandra, King Harshvardhana and Maharatheer Karna, found in the Puranas and epics like Mahabharata also seem to be a part of the common person's life as reflected from various rituals which ask for giving away one's belongings to those who are needier. Even the rituals which offer the tribute to the ancestors ('Shraddha') include the rite of 'Dan'. A person who is resistant to this spontaneous flow of generosity (empathic sharing of resources) is considered as 'Adham' (undersized).

If this perspective of emotional intelligence is brought into practice, it can contribute to even healing of emotional disturbances. This approach gives a way to holistic and long lasting change in the mind set for managing emotional turbulences more effectively. Changing physiological responses, behavior and/or cognitions, may not bring a lasting change in unhealthy emotional responsiveness, until the basic wish or desire is not dealt with. Understanding the roots of the transitory emotions and how they disappear into permanent emotional dispositions can be attained with the help of this perspective.

Such approach can be nurtured since childhood through purposeful efforts. Jnana Prabodhini, a renowned organization working with the motto of 'Man-making for nation building', has been working in this direction since last 50+ years. 'Vidya vrata sanskar', - a special initiation program focusing on inculcating life goals orientation among adolescents, includes inputs for such emotional and motivational development seen as one manifestation of integral development of the student. Motivation being an important element of emotional intelligence [5] needs to be addressed if one wants to develop it holistically. This development is described as a taxonomy which takes into account the motivation leading to internalization. One of its elements is the transformation of purpose of action starting from response to stimulus up to seeking the ultimate truth. While the other aspect of such development refers to increase in the power applied to the efforts for the realization of these purposes, one of the sources of this power being emotions [7]. Mentoring plays a very important role in development of such emotional intelligence as seen from this perspective. The actual company ('sahas') of the mentor/ Guru triggers the child's thought processes about internalizing the learning. And the mentor also should be enough open minded who would let the child/disciple choose what is appropriate.

‘यानि अनवद्यानि कर्माणि तानि त्वयोपास्यानि, नो इतराणि।’ (.....)

Thus the Indian view towards emotional intelligence covers not only the sensory and impulse level controls but it also beholds that basically every human is pure and complete

being ('Poornam'). What is needed is the unfolding of this completeness or the cleansing of the impurities accumulated and the integration of the fragmentary existence in day to day life. That strength is gained through true spiritual harmony. Development of emotional abilities is one of the roads leading to this far off life goal and one needs to be consistently and passionately observant towards oneself for the same.

Conclusion

Indian philosophy and traditional literature has discussed in depth and preached/ propagated through its educational traditions many modern day ideas and concepts about emotions, self-management, regulation and such other aspects of what is today gathered under the umbrella of 'Emotional intelligence' long before the western academic world brought them up. It has put forth an integration of value systems, emotional experiences and thought processes together to be reflected through actual behavior. Thus the Indian view towards emotional intelligence covers not only the sensory and impulse level controls but it also beholds that every person is potentially divine and complete. Unfolding of the emotional capacities in a systematic and well directed manner can lead to the state of YOG (integration of body and mind).

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