

Emotional Intelligence – Universal or Culture Specific? An Analysis with Reference to the Indian Philosophical Text, the Bhagavad-Gita.

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ABSTRACT

Emotional Intelligence, perhaps one of the most popular and extensively researched constructs of the twentieth century does not need any introduction. Its importance and relevance in various fields has been scientifically researched and asserted. Yet, the cross-cultural relevance of the concept still remains an unexplored area. Emotions being predominantly culture specific, the applicability of the various tests proposed by the theorists across cultures raises pertinent questions. This paper, though does not go into the empirical study, rather restricts itself to a qualitative analysis of the ‘ability model’ proposed by Mayer and Salovey against the background of Indian culture through the Bhagavad-Gita. Also, it does not take the entire text of the Bhagavad-Gita, as it is beyond the scope and limit of this paper to do so. It draws attention to a few slokas in the text which throws open fresh prospects of research and an understanding of Emotional Intelligence in the east, specifically, India. It draws attention to the similarities and the contrasts between an emotionally intelligent person as surmised by Mayer and Salovey, and the ‘Sthithapragnya’ as described by Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad-Gita.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence; cross-cultural; Bhagavad-Gita; Sthithapragnya; ability model

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INTRODUCTION

Emotional intelligence (EI), perhaps one of the most popular and the most researched psychological constructs of the 21st century (Ashkanasy, 2003;), emphasises the role of the emotions in an individual’s success or failure in the workplace and in life. Popularised by Goleman (1995),

the concept of EI has inspired applied research in every field, be it management, academics, life sciences or psychology. Though there are many definitions and constructs that classify the skills pertaining to emotional intelligence, three models have been recognised as widely used and accepted (Sharma *et. al.* (2009; Spielberger, 2004), namely:

- Mayer and Salovey's 'Ability Model'
- Goleman's 'Competency model' and
- Bar-On's 'Trait model'.

One of the definitions of EI is, it is "... the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth" (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

Mayer and Salovey's four-branch model of EI focused on emotional perception, emotional assimilation, understanding and management (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004). The skills are assessed by the 'Multifactor Emotional Intelligence Scale' (MEIS). To date, this is the only model that takes on a purely cognitive approach. Goleman (1998) on the other hand pointed to emotional self-awareness, self-control, empathy, problem solving, conflict management, leadership etc. as the characteristics of an emotionally intelligent person. In contrast, Reuven Bar-On (2002) agreed that it referred to the qualities of emotional self-awareness, self-actualisation, interpersonal relationship,

reality testing, stress tolerance, optimism, happiness etc. as these decide the emotional intelligence of a person. The mixed ability model proposed by Reuven Bar-On emphasises how personality traits influence a person's general wellbeing while Goleman's model focuses on workplace success (Stys & Brown, 2004). Goleman's model is measured by the Emotional Competency Inventory (ECI) (Boyatzis *et. al.*, 2000) and Bar-On's model is assessed using the Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i) (1997). As a fresh concept with only 20 years of history, the theoretical models have not concentrated much on the cross-cultural aspect of emotions (Sharma *et. al.*, 2009). Culture plays a significant role in deciding a person's response to any given situation and it is recognised that basic psychological processes depend on socio-cultural practices and meanings (Triandis, 2000). Culture has a crucial role to play in understanding and expressing emotions (Matsumoto *et. al.*, 2002; 2008). Broadly speaking, culture can be categorised as either collectivist or individualist (Srivastava *et. al.*, 2008). In a collectivist culture, individuals see themselves as interdependent with their groups (family, friends, society, tribe, country etc.), whereas in an individualist culture, people are independent and give more importance to personal goals and personal needs. Asian countries generally fall under the collectivist culture while North America, Australia and New Zealand, to name a few, are categorised under individualist culture. Explicit expression of strong feelings like

anger, love, frustration etc. are considered uncouth and are restrained in public in collectivistic cultures, but the same is considered essential in individualistic cultures. In other words, individualist cultures give more importance to self-interest, whereas collectivist cultures put group interest first. 'Self' is the key word, and it is inseparable from emotional intelligence (Gangopadhyay & Mandal, 2008). The word 'Self' has potentially different meanings for people of different cultures and thus, plays a crucial role in understanding and applying emotional intelligence across cultures. As this paper focuses particularly on Indian culture, the following section will briefly discuss the concept of 'Self' as understood in India compared with Western belief.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN THE INDIAN CULTURAL CONTEXT

Emotional intelligence is a concept that is not new to the Indian reader. Though there is hardly any serious research on EI from the Indian perspective (Sharma, 2012), anyone who has read ancient Indian literature will be aware that EI is embedded in every text. Indian philosophical tradition stresses on the powerful nature of emotions, which have to be harnessed for a harmonious life. References to the description and functions of the human mind can be found in the Rig Veda, Yajur Veda and the texts of Ayurveda. Patanjali, who is considered to be the 'Father of Indian Psychology', did a systematic, thorough research on the mysteries of the human mind, thousands

of years ahead of Western studies (Tattwamayananda, 1994). Though Indian philosophy has a religious strain which focuses or guides an individual in turning his mind to the Supreme Being, a careful study will reveal the fact that it is perfectly attuned to the down-to-earth needs of the present world as well (Engardio & McGregor, 2006). Hinduism is more a way of life than a religion and combines in it the fundamental principles of social, political and economic life.

The Concept of 'Self' in Western and Indian Philosophy

Before venturing further, a peek into the ideals of Indian philosophy, and a brief discussion of the understanding of the 'Self' as a Western concept and in Indian philosophy would be helpful to better appreciate this paper. Indian philosophy rests on three fundamental beliefs (Dasgupta, 1991) i.e. 'Karma', 'Atma' or the 'Soul' that is undestroyable and 'Mukti' or 'Salvation'. The theory of 'Karma' emphasises the responsibility of an individual in deciding his happiness and sorrow through his actions. Actions have the power of ordaining one's destiny, good or bad. It is also believed that the power of an individual's actions follows him through many births until he has experienced his due share of happiness and sorrow. Thus, the individual is impressed upon by society to choose a lifestyle that nurtures harmony and peace within himself. The second belief is that of the 'Atma' or the 'Soul' which takes on and discards many

bodies through the cycle of rebirths before it attains a state of bliss, merging with the Supreme Power in eternity. This merging of the 'Atma' with the Supreme Power is considered 'Mukti' or 'Salvation', towards which every individual trains his life. Since the individual's actions lead him or her through many births, he is taught to refrain from those emotions and desires that lead him to actions that in turn bind him. The 'Atma' or the 'Soul' is identified as the real 'Self' as opposed to the biological self in Indian philosophy. Krishna, in the Bhagavad-Gita describes this 'Self' as,

*Na jayate mriyate va kadacinnayam
bhutva bhavita van a bhuyah*

*Ajo nityah sasvato'yam purano na
hanyate hanyaamane sarire (In
Sanskrit)*

This is never born, nor does it die. It is not that, not having been, It again comes into being. This is unborn, eternal, changeless, ever-Itself. It is not killed when the body is killed. (Swami Swarupananda, 1996)

(Bhagavad- Gita, Ch. II, Sloka 20)

The 'Self' takes as many rebirths as needed to negate the accumulated 'Karma' before merging with the Supreme Being in eternal peace and happiness. Thus, as an individual identifies the pain and misery of this materialistic world, he turns his contemplation into himself, seeking to understand his 'Self', which leads to his deliverance from suffering and misery.

The Western concept or understanding of the 'Self' has been influenced by several philosophers and psychologists

such as Descartes, Freud, Adler and Jung, among others. One can find a harmonious resonance of thought in Western ideologies, as in Indian philosophy, regarding the 'Self'. Several scholars from the West have clearly identified and differentiated between 'I' and 'Me', one being the subject and the other being the object (Spiro, 1993). To explain further, 'I' is identified as the 'self as knower' and 'Me' is the 'self as known'. To quote Erikson (1968):

What the "I" reflects on when it sees or contemplates the body, the personality, and the roles to which it is attached for life-not knowing where it was before or will be after-are the various selves which make up our composite Self.

Shweder (1985) spoke about the 'I' as the 'observing ego', the "dynamic center of initiative and free will, works in concert with one's senses, reason, imagination, memory, and body." Though it can be seen that there is similarity in the Western and the Indian conception of 'Self', they do differ in perceiving or understanding this 'Self'. The Western and the Indian ideology of 'Self' converge as both see it as an entity, a homunculus within the individual's body. But the similarity ends there as different scholars and psychologists in the West try to perceive the 'Self' in different ways. Freud (1964) offered the model of 'Id', 'Ego' and the 'Super Ego' where 'Id' and 'Super Ego' stood for non-rational biological components of the individual and 'Ego' operated as the executor of his personality, the 'Self', which many theorists after Freud accepted and adhered

to. On the other hand, Horney (1950) opined that there was a 'real self' and an 'idealised self' within the individual, the 'real self' representing the unique force common to all, and the 'idealised self' being conceived out of social pressures and expectations. Similar to James (1981), Gordon Allport (1961) supported the concept of 'self as the knower' and 'self as an object'. It can be seen that the concept of 'Self' has undergone various definitions in the West as thinkers have tried to identify and understand it.

Now, to draw similarities between the Western and the Indian view (the term 'Eastern philosophy' has been avoided consciously, because the East has given rise to several other philosophies like Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism etc., which has different ideologies and perceptions) of 'Self', the 'inner Self' or the 'Soul' is referred to with a capital 'S' to differentiate it from references to self as the physical being. It is interesting to note that even as the Western philosophers differentiated between the 'Self as the knower' and 'self as the known', the Indian philosophy also refers to them as 'Kshetra' and 'Kshetragna'. 'Kshetra' is the body, the 'field' and 'Kshetragna' is the 'knower of the field' (Radhakrishnan, 2011). But the similarity ends there as the Western philosophical, anthropological or the psychological discussions on the 'Self' fail to define it in clear terms and it is often confused with the "... person, individual, personality, self-representation,..." and is

identified alike with the biological self by some and the transcendental self, the 'Soul', by some others (Spiro, 1993). There is no concrete demarcation or differentiation between the two, whereas Indian philosophy draws a clear line between the 'Kshetra' and the 'Kshetragna'. Krishna, in the thirteenth chapter of the Bhagavad-Gita, in slokas 5-11, defines the 'Kshetra' and in slokas 13-17 defines 'Kshetragna'. For instance, he says that 'Kshetra' is,

*mahabhutanyahankaro buddhiravyakta
meva ca
indriyani dasaikam ca panca
cendriyagocarah (In Sanskrit)*

*The five elements, the ego, the intellect,
the Unmanifest (Primordial Matter),
the ten organs (of perception and
action), the mind, the five objects of
sense (sound, touch, colour, taste and
smell) (Goyandka, 1996)*

(Bhagavad-Gita, Ch. XIII, Sloka, 5)

and 'Kshetragna' is,

*sarvatah panipadam tatsarvato'
ksisiromukham
sarvatah srutimalloke sarvamavrya
tisthati (In Sanskrit)*

*It has hands and feet on all sides, eyes,
head and mouth in all directions, and
ears all round; for it stands pervading
all in the universe.*

*sarvendriyagunabhasam sarvendriya
vivarjitam
asaktam sarvabhrccaiva nirgunam
gunabhoktr ca (In Sanskrit)*

Though perceiving all sense-objects It [sic] is, really speaking, devoid of all senses. Nay, though unattached, it is the sustainer of all nonetheless; and though attributeless, it is the quality enjoyer of qualities (the three modes of Prakriti).

*bahirantsca bhutanamacaram carameva
ca
siksmatvattadavijneyam durastham
cantike ca tat (In sanskrit)*

It exists without and within all beings, and constitutes the animate and inanimate creation as well. And by reason of its subtlety, It is incomprehensible; it is close at hand and stands afar too. (Goyandka, 1996)

(Bhagavad-Gita, Ch. XIII. Slokas 13, 14, 15)

The Indian philosophy speaks of the 'Self' as 'Brahman', the all-pervading force that is present in every individual, which has neither a beginning nor an end. As the Western world tries to comprehend the two different entities separately, Indian philosophy points out to the need to unite and converge the 'self as knower' and the 'self as known'. It speaks about the illusion of the individual in looking at them as two different entities. The 'Self as the Knower', the 'Brahman', is the real and the only one, a realisation of which leads to deliverance (Ho, 1995). "Man, the subject, should gain mastery over man, the object." (Radhakrishnan, 2011). This is the essence of Indian philosophy, gaining mastery over 'Self', which

delivers the individual from pain and suffering and reinstates him in eternal bliss.

Coming back to the focus of this paper, the 'Self', which the theorists of emotional intelligence refer to, is without doubt the 'self as the known', that which is identified by society as the socio-biological individual. Thus, when Mayer and Salovey speak about self-realisation, they are speaking about the 'self' in relation to the external world, that which is influenced by the external forces and not the 'inner self', the 'Self as the Knower'. On the other hand, the Bhagavad-Gita emphasises introspection, a journey towards understanding 'the inner Self', the 'Kshetragna', which helps an individual attain eternal bliss. Having clarified that, the natural question that arises is how an Indian philosophical text such as the Bhagavad-Gita can be used to understand emotional intelligence, or how any parallels can be drawn between the ideologies of the two.

My argument is that as an individual seeks to understand his 'inner Self', his clarity and wisdom in comprehending and understanding the external world becomes a natural outcome. As he realises himself, he also realises that those around him are of similar nature, and that they go through similar trials, and in understanding his own responses and reactions, opens up to the experiences of others as well. He will be able to empathise with them better as he identifies himself with them. As Mulla and Krishnan (2012) point out, when an individual becomes aware of the

‘Self’, which is divine in nature and is present in everyone, there is a “sense of connectedness with all beings.” It enables him to rise above petty differences of status and “creates a sense of oneness and or relatedness with others.” Further, a person who is Self-realised creates an atmosphere of peace and calm that is contagious, and eventually people around him experience the same tranquility. An incident quoted by Kavita Singh (2010) in her paper about the experience of James Dozier, a U.S Army General Brigadier who was kidnapped by a terrorist group illustrates this. Bringing to memory that emotions are contagious, he decided to keep calm although it was a difficult task, and was surprised to find that the kidnappers actually ‘caught’ the calmness he projected, and this literally saved his life.

I do not know if this can be proved empirically, as such experiences are personal and are based on trust and faith. But that is the basis of Indian philosophy, which emphasises realisation through self-experience. Each person has to search and experience the truth for himself. Recognising this characteristic of the Indian mind further helps in applying the concept of emotional intelligence in the Indian context. At present, this paper limits itself to comparing the modern theory of emotional intelligence as proposed by Salovey and Mayer, with the idea of emotional stability as expressed in the Bhagavad-Gita (a part of the great Indian epic ‘Mahabharata’), a text which has influenced people across cultures (Algeo,

2000). It mainly focuses on a few slokas from the second chapter of the Bhagavad-Gita, as it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss all the 18 chapters.

Research in the generalisability of emotional intelligence constructs across cultures has been undertaken in recent years (Rajendran *et al.*, 2007). In the Indian subcontinent too, studies abound in adopting the concept of emotional intelligence in organisational set-ups (Narayanan & Krishnan, 2003; Punia, 2004; Singh, 2007; Ghosh, 2007; Imtiaz & Ahmed, 2009; Muniappan & Satpathy, 2010; Bamel *et al.*, 2011). This paper in particular was inspired by studies by Mulla and Krishnan (2007; 2008; 2011; 2012), who have examined the concept of ‘Karma Yoga’ as in the Bhagavad-Gita as complementary to emotional intelligence. This led to the search for similarities between the concept of emotional intelligence and emotional stability (Sthithapragnya), resulting in identifying the slokas that convey similar thoughts. But this is just the tip of the iceberg, with further studies in the same area to bring out a construct of emotional intelligence that would be universally applicable. It is my humble belief that the ‘Karma Yoga’ proposed by Lord Krishna is a universally applicable concept, which can be embraced and understood by people of all cultures. This paper is the first of a series which strives to identify a construct for EI based on ‘Nishkama Karma’ that can be applied to all cultures. Though it sounds eccentric, in a global set-up where individuals from

all over the world meet and work, or study in a particular organisation, when the need arises to judge their emotional competence, there needs to be a single construct that is valid and applicable cross culturally. Thus, this paper sets the ball rolling in identifying a unique, cross-culturally valid construct of EI through ‘Nishkama Karma’.

OBJECTIVE OF THIS STUDY

The objective of this study is to draw attention to the similarities and differences between an emotionally intelligent person as defined by the ‘ability model’ and a ‘Sthithapragnya’ as defined by Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad-Gita.

The Bhagavad-Gita

The Bhagavad-Gita (The Divine Song), considered to be the fifth Veda, is Lord Krishna’s moral guidance to Arjuna on the battlefield. It is considered to be the essence of the four Vedas (Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva) (Easwaran, 1985; Robinson, 2005). The Vedas are Hindu religious texts that include hymns, incantations, religious rituals and sacrificial rites (Goodall, 1996). The Bhagavad-Gita gives the core message of the Vedas in a pragmatic way, thus being a more practical document than the Vedas (Jeste & Vahia, 2008).

An illustration from Milton’s ‘Paradise Lost’ will help here.

“... Horror and doubt distract

His troubled thoughts, and from the bottom stir

The hell within him; for within him Hell

He brings, and round about him, nor from Hell

One step, no more than from Himself, can fly

By change of place....”

(Paradise Lost, Book IV, Lines 18-23)

As Satan flies out of hell to avenge himself, one wonders how he could fly away from hell. When God had banished him from heaven, how could he have come back? But does Satan escape Hell? Milton explains Satan’s curse beautifully – “The Hell within him; for within him Hell...” The real hell is within him, in his mind, his thoughts. Where can he fly away to, away from himself? Unless the change, the repentance comes from within, there is no escape. As Milton subtly points out to the power of mind over body, Krishna in Bhagavad-Gita shares about this same power. The background to the Bhagavad-Gita is the Kurukshetra war where Arjuna must fight his first cousins. Arjuna, the warrior nonpareil, loses his nerve and refuses to fight. His mind is a cauldron of emotions gripped with the moral dilemma of to do or not to do. Even as Arjuna struggles to accept the fact that he has to fight his own kin, his guru and his childhood friend, Krishna, admonishes him for his lack of mental strength and points out the supremacy of people who have absolute control over their mind, who are focused on their duty and are unperturbed by either pain or pleasure.

*yam hi na vyathayanthyethe purusham
purusharshabha*

samadhukha sukham dheeram

somruthathvaya kalpathe (In Sanskrit)

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

(Bhagavad-Gita, Ch. II, Sloka 15)

Following this is an active, spontaneous conversation between Krishna and Arjuna, which throws light on the supremacy of knowledge, bhakthi (devotion) and selfless action. Krishna simplifies the philosophy of life as it can be understood and practised by even laymen who do not have any formal education.

Emotional Intelligence and the Bhagavad-Gita

The Mahabharata is the epic saga of conflict between the Kauravas and the Pandavas. It is a text that can be understood and interpreted at different levels. On the superficial level, it is about the clash for power. But, on a higher plane, it is about the war between 'Dharma' and 'Adharma', right and wrong. The opening verse of the Bhagavad-Gita begins as 'Dharmakshetre Kurukshetre': Dharmakshetre', where 'Dharma' was established and 'Kurukshetre', where the 'Kurus' fought. 'Kshetra', meaning 'field', can be understood at two levels: the physical topographical place where the war takes place and the 'mind' of every human being. The war at Kurukshetra can

be taken as symbolic of the struggle that every individual faces in varying degrees at various stages of his life.

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

One can see striking similarities between Krishna's emotionally stable person (Sthithapragnya) and Mayer and Salovey's emotionally intelligent person. Mayer and Salovey's 'ability model' (2004) identifies four stages through which a person becomes emotionally intelligent:

- Emotional perception
- Emotional assimilation
- Emotional understanding, and
- Emotional management

The first step, emotional perception, is the ability to be self-aware of emotions and to express them accurately. When a person is aware of the emotions he is experiencing, he moves on to the next level i.e. emotional assimilation, which is to distinguish between the different emotions he is experiencing and also to identify those emotions that affect his thought process. This ability leads him to emotional understanding, the ability to understand complex emotions and also to recognise the transition from one emotion to another. With emotional understanding comes emotional management as he becomes adept at managing his emotions by connecting to or disconnecting from any emotion at any given situation. This gives him complete control over his impulses and he is thus able to think, analyse and behave rationally in any situation. The first two stages are when a person identifies and becomes aware of his own and others' emotions and the awareness leading to a better judgment of the situation he is in and its consequences. Though the Bhagavad-Gita does not speak of this fundamental requirement of emotional intelligence, it stresses on the effectiveness of being able to control and manage emotions; these are the third and fourth stages. Arjuna has already satisfied the preconditions as he is aware of his emotional turmoil and clearly spells out his predicament to Krishna. He

perfectly understands his misgivings and seeks Krishna's help to overcome them. The slokas (verses) 4 to 8 of the second chapter of the Bhagavad-Gita portray the anguish of Arjuna in his own words:

*karpanyadosopahatasvabhavah
prechami tvam dharmasammudhacetah
yacchreyah syanniscitam bruhi tanme
sisyate ham sadhi mam tvam
prapannam (In Sanskrit)*

*With my nature overpowered by
weak commiseration, with a mind in
confusion about duty, I supplicate
Thee. Say decidedly what is good for
me. I am Thy disciple. Instruct me who
have taken refuge in Thee. (Swami
Swarupananda, 1996)*

*na hi prapasyami mamapanudyadyacc
hokamucchosanamindriyanam
avapya bhumavasapatnamrddham
rajyam suranamapi cadhipatyam
(In Sanskrit)*

*I do not see anything to remove
this sorrow which blasts my senses,
even were I to obtain unrivalled and
flourishing dominion over the earth,
and mastery over the gods. (Swami
Swarupananda, 1996)*

(Bhagavad-Gita, Ch. II. Slokas 7, 8)

We clearly see that Arjuna has what we may call the qualifying qualities of an emotionally intelligent person i.e. emotional perception and assimilation. The precise words chosen by him effectively convey his state of mind. He says that his nature is overpowered by 'weak commiseration'. He

commiserates with himself for being in a place where he has to fight people who are dear to him. He feels pity for his cousins, who have brought their entire clan to this sorrowful state. But he also realises that this commiseration is a weak one, one that weakens and confuses him against doing or even deciding on what his duty is, and thus supplicates to Krishna to guide him, advise him on the right course of action. It is in response to this that Krishna discusses at length the need for emotional management. It is interesting to note at this juncture that Krishna does not merely stress on effective emotional management but first spells out the reasons that lead to emotional disturbances and then moves on to the ways of dealing with them. Krishna offers a systematic analysis of the problem at hand and a solution as well. Thus Krishna's advice becomes more practical. The course of action that he advises Arjuna is one that can be followed by anyone at any place. The guidance is universal in nature and holds meaning even to present-day life.

Tracing the root cause of all emotional turmoil, Krishna identifies desire and anger as the two vices that lead an individual to his downfall.

*dhyayato visayanpumsah sangastesupa
jayate
sangatsanjayate kamah kamatkrodho'
bhijayate (In Sanskrit)*

*Thinking of objects, attachment to them
is formed in a man. From attachment
longing, and from longing anger
grows.*

*krodhadbhavati sammohah sammohatsm
rtivibhtamah
smrtibhramsadbuddhinaso buddhinasat
pranasyati (in Sanskrit)*

*From anger comes delusion, and
from delusion loss of memory. From
loss of memory comes the ruin of
discrimination, and from the ruin of
discrimination, he perishes. (Swami
Swarupananda, 1996).*

(Bhagavad-Gita, Ch. II, Slokas 62, 63)

It is the strong desire for and attachment to worldly objects that drives an individual to his downfall. Desire when not satisfied leads to anger, which in turn leads to delusion. This further destroys the ability to discriminate, which leads to complete ruin. Examples of those who fell to disgrace because of their desire, abound: Macbeth, Dr. Faustus, Satan and Icarus, to name a few. Macbeth, a brave warrior charts his own doom as he is swayed by the desire of becoming the King. He has no compunction in murdering the unsuspecting King who visits his castle. Though he does ascend the throne it is one wrought with guilt and misgivings, and at the end Macbeth is actually happy to die in the battlefield. He feels relieved that he is delivered from a life of guilt. Dr. Faustus' blunder is no less as he willingly sells his soul to the devil for name and fame. The terrible consequence of his act is not realised by him until the end. When realisation dawns, it is too late. Satan falls to eternal doom as he is overcome by the desire to become God. Icarus' fall (literal and metaphorical)

is because of his desire to reach greater heights than he is actually capable of. Indian literature equally focuses on the great heroes who fell to disgrace because of their attachment and desire that lead to ruinous anger. To take an example from the great epic 'Ramayana', Ravana the demon king was a great scholar and a great devotee of Lord Shiva. He was well versed in the Vedas and was also a great astrologer. His expertise in statecraft was recognised even by his opponents, and Lord Rama instructs his brother Lakshmana to learn the art of statecraft from the dying emperor after the war. How could such an erudite, scholarly, wise emperor fail to defeat a motley army of monkeys? It was his lust and desire for Sita, Rama's wife, that leads him to his ruin. His desire blinded his wisdom. He lost his power of discrimination. He failed to realise that abducting another man's wife against her wishes was a great sin which would eventually destroy him and his kingdom. His power of reasoning vanishes as he is gripped with desire and lust. Thus, it becomes evident that desire leads a man to his ruin however great he might be. The lessons that can be taken from the life of these one-time heroes stress the need for overcoming desire, lust and anger. The Bhagavad-Gita thus moves a step forward in the theory of EI and outlines what leads to loss of discrimination, and cautions the individual.

The Bhagavad-Gita refers to the emotionally intelligent person as a 'Sthithapragnya' (the emotionally stable person). As Arjuna asks Krishna who a

sthithapragnya is, Krishna describes the nature and qualities of a sthithapragnya in detail.

*sthitaprajnasya ka bhasa
samadhisthaya kesava
sthitadhih kim prabhaseta kimasita
vrajeta kim (In Sanskrit)*

What, O Kesava, is the description of a man of steady wisdom, merged in Samadhi? How (on the other hand) does the man of steady wisdom speak, how sit, how walk?

(Swami Swarupananda, 1996).

(Bhagavad-Gita, Ch. II, Sloka 54)

Krishna answers him in twenty one slokas (55 – 72) discussing in detail the qualities of an emotionally stable person.

*duhkhesvanudvignamanah sukhese
vigatasprhah
vitaragabhayakrodhah sthithadhirmani
rucyate (In Sanskrit)*

He whose mind is not shaken by adversity, who does not hanker after happiness, who has become free from affection, fear, and wrath, is indeed the Muni of steady wisdom.

*yah sarvatranabhisnehastattatprapya
subhasubham
nabhinandati na dvesti tasya prajna
pratisthita (In Sanskrit)*

He who is everywhere unattached, not pleased at receiving good, nor vexed at evil, his wisdom is fixed.

*yada samharate cayam kurmo 'nganiva
sarvasah*

indriyanindriyarthebhyastasya prajna pratiathita (In Sanskrit)

When also, like the tortoise drawing its limbs, he can completely withdraw the senses from their objects, then his wisdom becomes steady. (Swami Swarupananda, 1996).

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

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

- Ability to be open to feelings, both pleasant and unpleasant
- Ability to monitor and reflect on emotions
- Ability to engage, prolong or detach from an emotional state

- Ability to manage emotions in oneself, and the

- Ability to manage emotions in others

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

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

*karmanyevadhikaraste ma phalesu kadacana
ma karmaphalaheturbhuma te sango 'stvakarmani (In Sanskrit)*

Thy right is to work only; but never to the fruits thereof. Be thou not the producer of the fruits of (thy) actions; neither let thy attachment be towards inaction.

*yogasthah kuru karmani sangam tyaktva dhananjaya
siddhyasiddhyoh samo bhutva samatvam yoga ucyate (In Sanskrit)*

Being steadfast in Yoga, o Dhananjaya, perform actions, abandoning attachment, remaining unconcerned

as regards success and failure. This evenness of mind (in regard to success and failure) is known as Yoga.

*durena hyavaram karma
buddhiyagaddhananjaya
buddhau saramanviccha krpanah
phalahetavah (In Sanskrit)*

Work (with desire) is verily far inferior to that performed with the mind undisturbed by thoughts of results. O Dhananjaya, seek refuge in this evenness of mind. Wretched are they who act for results.

*buddhiyukto jahatiha ubhe
sukrtaduskrite
tasmadyogaya yujyasva yogah
karmasu kausalam (In Sanskrit)*

Endued with this evenness of mind, one frees oneself in this life, alike from vice and virtue. Devote thyself, therefore, to this Yoga. Yoga is the dexterity of work.

*karmajam buddhiyukta hi phalam
tyaktva manisinah
janmabandhavinirmuktah padam
gacchantyanamayam (In Sanskrit)*

The wise, possessed of this evenness of mind, abandoning the fruits of their actions, freed for ever from the fetters of birth, go to that state which is beyond all evil. (Swami Swarupananda, 1996)

(Bhagavad-Gita, Ch. II, Slokas 47-51)

Krishna points out that action without desire, action that does not bind the doer with the outcome is the right kind of action. When an individual acts for the sake of

action because it is the right thing to do, and does not fear the result, then his mind remains unfettered. Taking the example of Arjuna himself, Arjuna was worried about fighting his cousins because he was worried about the outcome. He was upset because he found no gain or happiness in winning the war. He did not want to fight because there was no positive result for him at the end of the war. Winning he loses, losing he gains nothing. If on the other hand, Arjuna does not think or worry about what is to happen after the war, but proceeds with the fight because it is his duty as a kshatriya to fight when called upon, then there is no confusion or emotional turmoil. He does what has been expected of him, not what is convenient or productive. This ‘Nishkama Karma’ has a dual effect. It frees the doer from the emotional imbroglio of worrying about the outcome and also frees him from the responsibility of the outcome as well. It is a liberating feeling which annihilates any negative thoughts or emotions. When the mind is free from negative emotions, it calms down and a calm, tranquil mind is the fountain head of all things positive. It is with a stamp of authority that Krishna declares,

*prasade sarvaduḥkhanam
hanirasyopajayate
prasannacetaso hyasu buddhih
paryavatisthate (In Sanskrit)*

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

(Bhagavad-Gita, Ch.II, Sloka 65).

This is the desired end towards which the proponents of emotional intelligence are working.

The above discussion clearly states the bright prospect of integrating emotional intelligence and emotional stability (Sthithapragnya) through 'Nishkama Karma'. Mulla and Krishnan (2007) pointed out in their research that 'Karma Yoga' and emotional intelligence are highly correlated. Several other studies have expressed belief that the 'ability model' of emotional intelligence can be effectively applied in the Indian context (Thingujam, 2002). Thus, it can be seen that parallels can be drawn between a Western concept of emotional intelligence and an Indian understanding of emotional stability. This leads us to future prospects of understanding and identifying similarities with other world cultures, which will enable a universal application of emotional intelligence.

CONCLUSION

The Bhagavad-Gita is a text that has influenced many thinkers from the East and the West alike. The lessons that can be taken from this divine exposition on the philosophy of life are boundless. Recent research has linked many concepts of management to the Bhagavad-Gita. As one commentator of the Bhagavad-Gita pointed out, it is a text that speaks of many things at different levels (Das, Sita pati). It is a 'complete' text – Purnam – as one says in Sanskrit. To quote the same pundit, "We can continue to discuss and inquire

about Bhagavadgita unlimitedly, and never find the end of its ability to produce the most profound realizations about life, the universe, and the purpose and the person behind them." This paper is but a drop in the ocean trying to find similarity of thought between the theory of EI and the Bhagavad-Gita. The prospects are innumerable for researchers to perfect the theory of emotional intelligence.

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