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Roots to emotional intelligence in India

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Introduction

From Plato till Daniel Goleman, several biologists and neuroscientists have worked, and are still working, on the subject of Emotional Intelligence. They are all trying to relate the success and intelligence of a person to his brain. However, the ways and means to success and how the mind and senses work in tandem have been explained by Lord Krishna in his divine song, the Bhagavad Gita. The Gita has a solution for all our explorations on human psychology and performance.

In this article, the focus has been on the mind and its control, and the individual's intelligence that helps him understand himself and submit completely to the supreme self (thus becoming Stitahpragna or Emotionally Intelligent).

Birth of emotional intelligence and its popularity in modern times

Scientists who specialize in studying how the mind and brain work are called neuroscientists. Neuroscientists study the way brain cells "talk" to each other by sending and receiving chemical messages. Using modern technology (like brain scans), neuroscientists can actually watch brains at work. Brain scans are essentially like videos of the inside of the brain when someone is reading and sleeping or speaking. Though much has been learned in recent years, much about the brain and mind still remains a mystery.

Emotions and Senses

Emotions, also called feelings, are the experiences of love, hate, anger, trust, joy, panic, fear, grief, and so forth. They are specific reactions to particular events that are usually of fairly short duration. The feelings that are generated from emotions arise as ripples created in the subconscious mind. The amygdala (derived from the Greek word for almond) the birthplace of emotions, is situated in the brain. It is an almond-sized and shaped brain structure in the medial temporal lobe, a few inches from either ear, and has long been linked with a person's mental and emotional state. The brain is connected to five sense organs (eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin) through the nervous system. It therefore recognizes five major senses: sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste.

Brain and Mind

The human brain is highly complicated. Besides all it does in sending signals back and forth to help an individual control his body, it also consists of parts that are responsible for the work of one's mind—for thinking and learning.

Although the brain is a part of the individual body, the mind is not. The word "mind" is used for the thinking parts and jobs of one's brain. "Mind work" or "learning" is done in many different areas of one's brain.

The different kinds of mind jobs are called functions. Here are some mind functions:

- understanding language when you listen, write, or read
- using language well when you speak with attention
- remembering things you've seen or heard
- being good at something, like music or sports
- knowing how to fix something that's broken
- knowing how to get other kids to like you

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All the emotions generated from the amygdala of the brain disturb the mind. The irregular chaotic and unstable behavior of humans is the attack of emotions on their thought process, i.e. on their mind. A person whose emotions always attack the mind is considered disturbed and emotionally unstable. The mind can however control the senses. When the senses are controlled, the individual is said to be detached and when he is detached he can able to strike a chord between his inner self and the supreme self, thus becoming emotionally intelligent.

History of emotional intelligence

Curiosity and passion across world to know more on emotions started 2000 years ago when Plato wrote, "All learning's have an emotional base." Since then, scientists, educators and philosophers are working to prove or disprove the importance of feelings. In the 20th century, the momentum on emotional intelligence picked up like any thing. Human behavioral psychologists and researchers brought form and shape to emotional intelligence.

Psychologists in the early 1940s began to think and write about intelligence, focusing on cognitive aspects such as memory and problem-solving. However, there were researchers who recognized non-cognitive aspects and emphasized their importance. For instance, David Wechsler defined intelligence as "the aggregate or global capacity of the individual to act purposefully, to think rationally, and to deal effectively with his environment." He referred to "non-intellective" as well as "intellective" elements, by which he meant affective, personal and social factors.

In 1943, he proposed that the non-intellective abilities were essential in predicting the ability to succeed in life. He tried to show that in addition to intellective factors there are also definite non-intellective factors that determine intelligent behavior.

Wechsler was not the only researcher who saw non-cognitive aspects of intelligence to be important for adaptation and success. In the late 30s, Robert Thorndike wrote on "social intelligence". Unfortunately, the work of these early pioneers was largely forgotten or overlooked until 1983 when Howard Gardner began to write about "multiple intelligence". Gardner proposed that "intrapersonal" and "interpersonal" intelligences are as important as the type of intelligence typically measured by IQ and related tests.

When Salovey and Mayer coined the term emotional intelligence in 1990, they were aware of the previous work on non-cognitive aspects of intelligence. They described emotional intelligence as "a form of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and action." In the early 1990s, Daniel Goleman became aware of Salovey and Mayer's work, and this eventually led to his book, Emotional Intelligence.

The ability to manage feelings and handle stress is another aspect of emotional intelligence that has been found to be important for success. A study of store managers in a retail chain found that the ability to handle stress predicted net profits, sales per square foot, sales per employee, and per dollar of inventory investment. Emotional intelligence has as much to do with knowing when and how to express emotion as with controlling it.

Rosenthal and his colleagues at Harvard discovered over two decades ago that people who were best at identifying others' emotions were more successful in their work as well as in their social lives.

Goleman and Mayer, Salovey and Caruso have argued that by itself emotional intelligence probably is not a strong predictor of job performance. Rather, it provides the bedrock for competencies that are. Goleman has tried to represent this idea by making a distinction between emotional intelligence and emotional competence. Emotional competence refers to the personal and social skills that lead to superior performance in the world of work. "The emotional competencies are linked and attached to emotional intelligence. A certain level of emotional intelligence is necessary to learn the emotional competencies." For instance, the ability to recognize accurately what another person is feeling enables one to develop a specific competency such as influence. Similarly, people who are better able to regulate their emotions will find it easier to develop a competency such as initiative or achievement drive. Ultimately, it is these social and emotional competencies that we need to identify and measure if we want to be able to predict performance. Every researcher and human behavioral psychologist has inferred that emotional intelligence is the ultimate mantra for individual success.

Focus on emotional intelligence

Few years ago, Harvard Business Review published an article on emotional intelligence that attracted a higher percentage of readers than any other article published in that periodical in the last 40 years. It was found that maximum copies were bought by the organization Johnson & Johnson. The CEO of Johnson & Johnson was so impressed with the article; he sent copies to his entire work force, including 400 top executives in the company worldwide. Since then, people across the world have been talking on emotional intelligence.

Is emotional intelligence new to Indians?

The concept of emotional intelligence is deeply rooted in India and has received proper appreciation from Indians. It is not new to them. There are several instances in Indian history properly exemplified in Indian Hindu mythology, where emotional intelligence was thoroughly discussed. There are even symbolic moments and incidents that depict emotional intelligence. It is believed that emotional intelligence is the only intelligence where an individual understands himself, controls his emotions and focuses on the supreme self. It is a form of submission and dedication where the individual's senses are in full control.

The Bhagavad Gita, sacred book of Hindu Indians, has the first effective and powerful communication on emotional intelligence. The Gita is considered as celestial song of Lord Krishna, sung 5000 years ago. It dealt with emotional intelligence, where emotions are defined as "voluptuous flow of feel / passion that arise out of human mind". At a given point of time, several sets of emotions arise from human brain which needs to be controlled so that the mind stays in focus. Emotional intelligence was communicated both in abstract and through concrete situations. Every aspect and act that was depicted in the Mahabharata till the point where Arjuna wishes to leave the battlefield is an ensemble of emotional intelligence.

Preface to the bhagavad gita

The Bhagavad Gita has attained the status of a holy book for the Hindus. It is a part of the Mahabharata: an episode in the concluding part, Santi Parva. It is a conversation between characters Arjuna (warrior in battlefield) and Krishna (charioteer of Arjuna). Though Krishna is seen as charioteer

in the episode, he is not a charioteer. He is Supreme Being-God in human form. The way charioteer controls horses with a wand supreme being, god, Krishna is managing senses of Arjuna and all the beings. In the battlefield he played role of adviser to Arjuna, when the latter (Arjuna) shown diffidence caused by moral doubt and confusion.

The story of Mahabharata revolves around a royal family. The two brothers of the family Dhritrashtra and Pandu brought forth two families, the Kauravas and Pandavas respectively. The Kauravas comprised a hundred brothers while the Pandavas comprised five. The Mahabharata is the fight between these two families for the kingdom of Hasthinapura.

The story goes that the eldest Kaurava, Duryodhana, is reluctant to give the Pandavas their share of the kingdom. He, with his coterie— the Dushta Chatushtayam (including Sakuni, Karna and Dushasana)— humiliated the Pandavas several times; in spite of the advice of elderly people who repeatedly urged them to be honest and just.

In order of seniority, the Pandavas were Yudhishtir, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva. Krishna, the eighth incarnation of Lord Vishnu, was their cousin and constant guide.

Communication and emotional intelligence in the bhagavad gita

There were two methods by which Lord Krishna taught Arjuna emotional intelligence:

1. Situational communication
2. Verbal communication.

Situational communication

The following are various situations that have illustrated emotional intelligence in the war episode of Mahabharata. All reflect that controlling one's emotions leads to control over the senses. Control of senses in turn leads to focus and detachment; and ultimately the person becomes emotionally intelligent where in his inner self able to recognize and tie with supreme self.

Submission of sanjaya to supreme-self

The Bhagavad Gita begins at the scene of the great battle at Kurukshetra, which brings the Kauravas and the Pandavas face to face in the final trial of strength.

Dhritrashtra, father of the Kauravas, being blind since birth, does not participate in battle. He is left alone at the palace with his wife Gandhari and his Minister Sanjaya. He is worried and anxious to know about proceedings at the battlefield. Through request and persuasion, Lord Krishna asks Sanjaya to focus all his senses on him and to try and see proceedings at battlefield. Here it is an act of emotional intelligence, where the individual's mind is controlled, becomes stable, and thus keeps his senses under control and focused on the supreme self. This is the stage of perfection or pinnacle of submission where the individual's senses stay focused on the supreme self. Such an act is called as trance, or Samadhi, wherein one's mind is completely restrained from material mental activities. This is still being practiced in modern times through yoga. It is characterized by one's ability to see the self through the pure mind, and appreciate and rejoice in the self. In that joyous state, one is situated in boundless transcendental happiness and enjoys oneself through transcendental senses. Established thus, one never departs from the truth and knows that there is no greater gain. In such a position, one is never shaken, even in the midst of great difficulty. This indeed is actual freedom from all miseries arising from material contact.

The chariot gifted to arjun

On the first day of battle, the complete forces of both sides are present on the battlefield. Bhishma Pitamaha is in command of the Kaurava army and similarly Yudhishtir commands the Pandava army. The striking feature is Lord Krishna, the eighth incarnation of Lord Vishnu— he is driving the chariot for Arjuna.

Arjuna's chariot was given to him by Agni, the fire god; this indicates that the chariot was capable of conquering all sides, wherever it was drawn over the three worlds. Agni is said to be stable-minded and because his emotions are controlled and focused on the supreme he stays at ease, acts quickly and succeeds.

Blow of conch shells

Traditionally, the commander-in-chief of an army would motivate his team by blowing a conch shell. The sound of the conch inspired team members to fight for their team with valor and zeal. Blowing conches brought all emotions in control and made all senses unidirectional and focused.

First, Bhishma Pitamaha on the Kauravas' side blew his conch. Then Lord Krishna blew his conch, the Panchajanya; Arjuna blew his, the Devadatta; and Bhima, blew his terrific conch shell, the Panndram. In contrast with the sound of the conch blown by Bhishma, the conches in the hands of Krishna and Arjuna are described as transcendental. The sound of the transcendental conches indicate that there is no hope of victory for the Kauravas because Krishna is on the Pandavas' side.

Jayas tu pandu-putranam yesam pakse janardanah. Victory is always with persons like the sons of Pandu because Lord Krishna is associated with them. And whenever and wherever the Lord is present, the goddess of fortune is also there because the goddess of fortune never lives alone without her husband. Therefore, victory and fortune were awaiting Arjuna, as indicated by the transcendental sound of the conch of Vishnu, or Lord Krishna.

It was written in the Mahabharata that the sound blown from the conch of Lord Krishna (and partly of Arjuna) was motivating and inspirational. Lord Krishna is supreme and ultimate. He controls all senses and is referred as Hrishikesa-- All living entities are a part and parcel of him, and therefore, the senses of the living entities are also a part and parcel of His senses. The Lord is believed to be situated in the hearts of all living entities and direct their senses. He is the inner self. He directs senses and sees that the inner senses meet the outer senses, i.e. supreme self. Here on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, the Lord directly controls the transcendental senses of all the people assembled.

Portrait of the bhagavad gita

The very first image that strikes the mind of an Indian on hearing the words Bhagavad Gita is a picture of Krishna and Arjuna in a chariot drawn by five horses, with Krishna holding the reins. If Arjuna was going to war, why was Krishna holding the reins? Here is a depiction of emotional intelligence. The chariot represents Arjuna's body and the five horses, his five senses. The spiritual significance of this is a direct reference to the Bhagavad Gita which says, "God descends on earth when unrighteousness prevails and He 'embodies Himself' to protect the virtues, destroy the vices and to re-establish dharma." To "embody Himself" means that he uses the body of Arjuna (Brahma) to teach the knowledge of the Bhagavad Gita, because the very Bhagavad Gita, says

God, is above the bondage of birth and rebirth, nature and karma.

The picture of Krishna and Arjuna in the chariot therefore is only symbolic. It simply demonstrates that when God, the Supreme Soul, who does not have a body of his own descends on earth, He incarnates into the body of Arjuna (Brahma). It means that when God is speaking through the mouth of Arjuna, two souls are present in the body of Arjuna with God playing the dominant role as the sermonizer and the soul of Arjuna becomes the listener. This is the same as Krishna holding the reins, which means that he is sermonizing while Arjuna is listening and inculcating the knowledge.

Verbal communication in form of song

Arjuna, the “middle” of Pandava brothers, requests Krishna to lead the chariot to a central point, between the two arrays of hostile forces. As he surveys the field he is overcome with emotion; the absurdity of war that dominates his mind.

With tears rolling from eyes he questions Lord Krishna, “Is this called victory, if I kill all my relatives and my people?” He pleads with Krishna to drive the chariot back and leave the battlefield. Arjuna says to Krishna “The mind” is very fickle indeed. “Oh! Krishna, it’s turbulent, strong and obstinate.” I think it is as “impossible to control the mind as the wind.” The answer that Krishna gives forms the 18 chapters of the Bhagavad Gita. Free of doubt and firm in the mind, Arjuna enters the field and emerges triumphant.

Stitahpragna

The human being can evolve through restraint of the senses so as to reach the state of Stitahpragna— steadfast consciousness.

Stitahpragna is current day emotional intelligence

Stitahpragna is about understanding oneself. Stitahpragna is also about understanding the feelings of others. When an individual controls his emotions, he is able to see the path of senses and can control them, divert them and become successful in performing his duties.

Stitahpragna and its similarity with tortoise

The state of Stitahpragna can be correlated with the behavior of a tortoise. As the tortoise draws within its shell all its limbs, similarly, is he who withdraws his senses from surrounding objects— he is said to have a conscious mind, firm and dedicated.

Prerequisites to emotional intelligence or stitahpragna

Control of the senses, non-attachment, universality of vision and constant consciousness towards goal, continuous introspection are the prerequisites to becoming emotionally stable and intelligent.

Steps to becoming emotionally intelligent as explained by lord krishna

Mind control

In his divine song, the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna focuses continuously on emotions, senses and mind. “Mental satisfaction, gentleness, silence, self-control, purification of thoughts, this is called the austerity of mind.” The mind is likened to the sixth sense, and is described as fickle and unstable by nature. Lord Krishna says “It’s very difficult to control the ever moving mind. However, through sincere practice and dispassionate and detachment it can be achieved.”

Mind stability

Stability of mind means maintaining the same state in all circumstances and under all conditions.

“When a person gives up all the desires in his thoughtful state and when his inner self is satisfied within itself, at that time he is said to be a Stitahpragna (a master in the stability of mind).” He is the one who is “undisturbed amidst threefold miseries, immobile in happiness, free from attraction, fear and anger, is called a sage of stable mind.”

“He who has conquered his self is in the company of the Supreme. In cold or heat, happiness or sorrow, respect or disrespect, he is always serene.”

“He is superior who maintains the same attitude towards his well wishers, friends, enemies, non-aligned, arbitrators, haters, relations, saints and sinners.”

Desire control

The restlessness of the mind is caused by the activity of the senses which binds the mind to sense objects through desire. So the mind cannot be stabilized unless the senses are controlled and detached from sense-objects. This is done through the cultivation of detachment.

Sense object cease to torment one who practices abstention, although the taste for them still remains in his consciousness. It disappears completely only when he experiences the transcendental life.

Salvation

Thus moksha, the word used in the Bhagavad Gita to mean liberation, often also salvation, is emphasized as an attainment in this world. It is essentially a state of peace in which nothing can agitate the mind.

Sense control

“The senses throw out of balance even the mind of a man who has complete knowledge of discrimination and is attempting to control them. Keeping all the senses under his full control he who establishes them in me, his intelligence is stabilized.” By constantly thinking of sense objects, one develops an attachment for them. From attachment is born desire and from desire comes anger. From anger develops delusion; from delusion comes confusion of memory; from confusion of memory arises loss of intelligence; and when intelligence is lost man becomes unstable. “Freed from passion and dispassion, by keeping the senses that are acting on the sense-objects under firm control and by following the dictates of the inner soul, a person can gain the mercy of God.”

According to the Bhagavad Gita, self realization is not possible without achieving stability of the mind or the state of Stitahpragna. Stability of mind means remaining the same under all circumstances and conditions. The following verses give us an idea of what it is.

“When a person gives up all desires in his thoughtful state and when his inner self is satisfied within itself, at that time he is said to be a Stitahpragna (a master in the stability of mind).” “Undisturbed amidst three fold miseries, immobile in happiness, free from attraction, fear and anger, is called a sage of stable mind”.

Equanimity of mind

“He who has controlled his self (mind), certainly self is his best relation, but for him the self is his enemy who has not controlled his self”. “He who has conquered his self is in the company of the Supreme. In cold or heat, happiness or

sorrow, respect or disrespect, he is always serene". "He who is contended with knowledge and wisdom, who is stable and master of his senses and who treats equally gold or pebbles or a piece of stone, such a self-realized soul is fit to be called a Yogi". The Bhagavad Gita lays heavy emphasis on the need to cultivate stability of mind for individual success. Equanimity of the mind is the precondition to self-realization. When the mind ceases its movements and becomes stable (nischala), one is called Stitahpragna (one who is stabilized in intelligence). Without this state of mind, self realization is a difficult task.

The mind is fickle like the wind or candle light or water in motion. But it can be controlled through abhyas (practice) and vairagya (dispassion). According to the Bhagavad Gita, the mind is unstable because of the activity of the senses and the attachment of the mind to the sense-objects. An unstable mind verily is the cause of delusion, an enemy of the self whereas the stabilized mind is the very seat of individual consciousness, the doorway to self realization and the precondition for attainment of immortality. These are however not the only means. Pure and sincere devotion, concentration, performing actions without desire and without seeking to enjoy the fruit of actions, living in solitude, accepting life as it unfolds, completely surrendering to oneself and living the life of sacrifice are equally effective.

Moderation in everything we do is another method prescribed to achieve this state of mind. The mind becomes stable when one realizes the interplay of the gunas in deluding men and transcends these gunas through practice. With the stability of the mind comes undisturbed peace and unending calm. All sorrows cease to bother the person who has become stable in mind as his mind does not crave anything and accepts every condition of life equally as divine providence (yaddruchcha labha samtushta) and goes through all experiences with the same attitude and becomes immune to the play of prakriti.

He goes beyond the sense of duality (dwandatitha) and overcomes jealousy. He lifts the veil of illusion covering his mind and sees with his inner eyes the beauty and splendor of his self deep within and beyond. He becomes united with the Infinite Consciousness, sees the self in all beings and all beings in the self.

Similarities between the bhagavad gita and emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence is about understanding one's own emotions and also emotions of others.

According to Daniel Goleman, there are two types of competencies attached to emotional intelligence. They are personnel competence and social competence.

Individuals become successful when they develop the competency to understand themselves and others.

The Bhagavad Gita also emphasizes two competencies that one needs to realize to become successful. They are the called the Inner self and the Supreme self (known as atma swaroopam and brahma swaroopam respectively).

So far, neuropsychological and behavioral researches have spoken continuously on emotions, senses, intelligence and emotional intelligence but no one has given the means to strike chord between the two. Even Daniel Goleman has given the factors that contribute to personal competence and social competence but has not discussed their direction. The Bhagavad Gita, the ancient Hindu mythological text that has taught Indians human values, ethics and culture, has focused profoundly on methods of striking balance.

How to strike a chord between the inner self and the supreme self

The Inner self comes in tune with the Supreme self through the stage called trance or Samadhi; wherein one's mind is completely restrained from material mental activities. This is practiced through yoga. This is characterized by one's ability to use the pure mind to see the self and to rejoice in it. In that joyous state, one is situated in boundless transcendental happiness and enjoys oneself through transcendental senses. Established thus, one never departs from the truth and upon gaining this believes that there is no greater gain. In such a position, one is never shaken, even in the midst of the greatest difficulty. This indeed is actual freedom from all miseries arising from material contact.

Conclusion

Our tradition and culture are so powerful and predominant, they can correlate any new philosophy to our Puranas and Vedas. However, it's our weakness that we are unable to understand our system and culture and our ideologies and depend on the rediscovery of our thoughts. Let's wake up to this, and act and learn all our hidden philosophies to bring them suitable recognition. Let's not wait for someone to dig these philosophies.