CHAPTER – I

Introduction

1.1 EMOTIONS

Let’s not forget that the little emotions are the great captains of our lives and we obey them without realizing it. ~Vincent Van Gogh, 1889.

Emotions are those that define a person. Emotions shape a man’s destiny and define the way he perceives life. As the famous Sanskrit saying goes –

Mano Matram Jagat; Mano Kalpitam Jagat - (“the world is as the mind sees and feels it; the world is as the mind thinks of it” (as quoted. by T.N.Sethumadhavan, 2010).

Emotion as defined in a dictionary is a state of feeling involving thoughts, physiological changes, and an outward expression or behavior. But, theologists, psychologists, philosophers, scientists and researchers have developed and are still developing various theories to fathom its bottomless expanse of intrigue and fascination. While theologists study emotions or rather control of emotions as a means of realizing the Supreme Being, psychologists and sociologists have discussed emotions against their significance to the individual and society. On the other hand, the natural scientists like physiologists are interested in the origin, evolution and functions of emotions.

1.2 DIFFERING PERCEPTIONS OF EMOTIONS

Human beings are a complex species of emotion and reason. While reasoning enables them to judge things with mathematical precision, emotions help them to understand and empathize which make them ‘human’. Traditionally it was believed and accepted that people with higher reasoning skills and a sound logical bend of mind were more intelligent. The IQ tests that were designed to ascertain a person’s intelligence and competency tested only the reasoning and the logical aptitude of the person. As Woodworth (1940) suggested, IQ tests were considered effective when they tested a person being ‘not’ afraid or angry or inquisitive over things that aroused emotions. Emotions were regarded as being disruptive
in nature that hindered a person’s thought process. Erasmus of Rotterdam, a sixteenth century humanist proclaimed:

“Jupiter has bestowed far more passion than reason – you could calculate the ratio as 24 to one. He set up two raging tyrants in opposition to Reason’s solitary power: anger and lust. How far can reason prevail against the combined forces of these two, the common life of man makes quite clear.” (as cited by Goleman, 1995)

Young (1943) defined emotions as “acute disturbances of the individual…” and believed that emotions made people ‘lose control’. But, not all felt or accepted emotions as ‘disorganized interruptions’ (Salovey and Mayer, 1990). Mowrer (1960) was one of the first who opined that,

“… emotions are of quite extraordinary importance in the total economy of living organisms and do not deserve being put into opposition with ‘intelligence’. The emotions are, it seems, themselves a higher order of intelligence.”

There was a clear shift of focus from emotions being considered as disruptive to where it was considered as assisting cognition. The positive relationship between emotions and cognition was established by the ‘cognitive theorists’ who supposed that emotions depended on personal interpretation or appraisal of a particular event. Any event or an occurrence has a personal meaning for every person and the person reacts depending on this personal meaning and his evaluation of the event based on his personal well-being. Others like Stanley, Schachter and Jerome Singer proposed that emotions involved both physiological arousal and the cognitive appraisal of this arousal. Even when people experienced a state of ‘nonspecific physiological arousal’ like anger, happiness or others, they tried to evaluate and reason it to figure out what those arousals meant for them (Dursun et. al., 2010). As the author further surmises, some theorists explained the process of emotion as first identifying the objects or events, second appraisal, third physiological changes, fourth action or expression and finally, regulation. First comes the appraisal and then the emotion and thus there is no question of emotion disrupting cognition. Researchers had moved from the phase where they believed that emotions are disruptive, to a phase
where they saw that emotion and reason are interconnected and that most of the times, cognition or reasoning precedes emotions. Intelligence and emotion which were considered as separate fields now integrated in the new field ‘Cognition and affect’ (Mayer, 2001).

The perspectives about emotions keep varying. The subjective nature of emotions makes it difficult to bring in a single accepted definition or theory. To scientifically conceptualize something that can only be felt and experienced becomes an almost impossible task. Different theories on emotions have attempted to understand the nature of emotions and how they are experienced by people.

- The James-Lange theory believes that a particular event or an occurrence causes a physiological change and then this change is interpreted into a corresponding emotion,

- The Cannon-Bard theory believes that we perceive the physiological change and the emotion at the same time.

- The Schachter-Singer theory brings in the angle of reasoning which intervenes the physiological change and the labeling of the emotion.

- Lazarus theory speaks of thought coming first before perceiving the emotion and

- The Facial Feedback theory speaks about emotions as an experience of facial expressions (when someone smiles, he experiences happiness – the expression preceding the cognition).

On the other hand, we have Sapir – Whorf, who hypothesized that language influenced thinking and Chomsky, who believed language and cognition to be separate abilities of the mind (Perlovsky, 2009).

The theories and concepts are innumerable. Emotion maybe “… a complex, diffuse concept that can be expressed differently at different levels of abstraction” (Mathews et. al., 2004), nevertheless, the beauty and appeal lies in the fact that each of these concepts holding a place of significance for themselves and have also revolutionized the way people perceived
emotions. No longer seen as only troublesome, it was being realized that emotions played a pivotal role in cognition and motivation. As Caruso (2008) observes, “emotions direct our attention and motivate us to engage in certain behaviors.” Emotions according to him “do not interfere with good decision making, they are, in fact, necessary and critical for all effective decisions.” How effective they are, will be discussed in detail, later, but for now it would suffice to note that emotions are not necessarily opposed to reason as it was believed earlier but, they also help in effective reasoning and decision making. Before proceeding further, it would be worthwhile to distinguish between what the words ‘emotion’ and ‘feeling’ stand for, and why it is preferred to use ‘emotion’ rather than ‘feeling’. The two words are quite commonly used and interchanged freely, but it is worthwhile to be precise in the selection and usage of words, especially when the entire research is based on emotions and the intelligent management of emotions.

1.3 EMOTION OR FEELING

The biologist Charles Birch (1995) said that “Feelings are what matter the most in life”. Whether it matters the ‘most’ is contentious, but it certainly is essential. The terms ‘feelings’ and ‘emotions’ are generally used interchangeably, and as Wierzbicka (1999) observes certain languages (French, German, Russian) do not have an equivalent term for the English word ‘emotion’. But, there are certain crucial differences between ‘feelings’ and ‘emotions’. A ‘feeling’ can be a physical sensation which is experienced, ‘like a flushed face, or a knot in our stomach or a general feeling of unease’ that could be due to an emotion (Caruso, 2008). One can speak about a ‘feeling of hunger’ and not an ‘emotion of hunger’. When asked to list a few emotions, one would say – happiness, sadness, guilt, etc. So, are ‘feelings’ more appropriate to bodily or physical responses and ‘emotions’ to thought? In that case, what does the individual mean when he/she expresses a ‘feeling of loneliness’? Is that related to thought or a physical experience? It seems more appropriate to accept that ‘The English word ‘emotion’ combines in its meaning a reference to ‘feeling’, a reference to ‘thinking’ and a reference to ‘human body’ (Wierzbicka, 1999). Thus, when the word ‘emotions’, is used, the qualities of all the three – feeling, thinking and physical experience – are combined. Many psychologists also prefer the word
‘emotion’ over ‘feeling’ because somehow ‘emotion’ appears to be more objective than ‘feeling’ (Wierzbicka, 1999), and it is easier to scientifically, logically analyze something that is more objective than that which is subjective. So, if ‘intelligence’ is thinking and rationalizing, and emotions combine the quality of thinking along with feeling, can it be surmised that emotions too can be analyzed and assessed like any other intelligence? This is the premise of the theory of emotional intelligence which emphasizes the importance of emotional regulation and emotional management in an individual’s life. The following sections discuss the evolution and development of emotional intelligence as a theory.

1.4 THE EVOLUTION OF THE THEORY OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence per se was always connected with only intellect and cognition. It was believed that there was only one ‘intelligence’ called ‘g’ for general intelligence. A person was born with a certain intelligence which could be assessed by using short answer tests (IQ tests). Psychologists also believed that this intelligence was difficult to change. But, can intelligence be only reasoning and cognitive abilities? Gardner (1998) makes a compelling point when he questions – were the IQ tests in this world to disappear, will it be impossible to identify a person as intelligent or otherwise? Such questions have led us to a new world of understanding which has agreed that apart from the intellectual prowess, there are other inherent abilities of an individual which should also be taken into consideration before assessing his/her intelligence. While tracing the evolution of the emotional intelligence theory, one finds that attention to ‘non-intellective’ elements being equally important was brought in as early as 1920 by Thorndike. This was followed by David Wechsler in 1940, who opined that,

“The main question is whether non-intellective, that is affective and conative abilities, are admissible as factors of general intelligence. (My contention) has been that such factors are not only admissible but necessary. I have tried to show that in addition to intellective there are also definite non-intellective factors that determine intelligent behavior. If the foregoing observations are correct, it follows that we cannot expect to measure total intelligence until our tests also include some measures of the non-intellective factors.” (Wechsler, 1943 as cited in Cherniss, 2000)
Though it was not given serious thought and research, interest in these areas (non-intellective factors) was revived with Howard Gardner’s theory of ‘Multiple Intelligence’ in 1983. A strong critic of IQ tests, his conviction was that “Human beings are better thought of as possessing a number of relatively independent faculties, rather than as having a certain amount of intellectual horsepower (or IQ) that can be simply channeled in one or another direction.” (Gardner, 1998). As Gardner further discusses in the same paper, a person’s intellect or non-intellect cannot be sealed by a single intelligence test as every human being in his/her own way has multiple latent abilities. These abilities were not acknowledged by the conventional methods of testing. Based on this belief, he defined intelligence as “a psychobiological potential to process information so as to solve problems or to fashion products that are valued in at least one cultural context”. By 1983, armed with a thorough research in psychology, anthropology, cultural studies and the biological sciences, he proposed in his book “Frames of Mind: The theory of multiple intelligences”, seven intelligences – linguistic, logical, musical, spatial, kinesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal – which every human being possessed, maybe in varying degrees. In 1995, an eighth intelligence – ‘naturalist’ – was added. The Multiple Intelligence (MI) theory makes the following two major claims:

- all human beings have all these intelligences
- no two individuals have exactly the same combination of these intelligences

Presumably, not many were comfortable with these claims and some even labelled it as a ‘radical theory’. But, as Gardner (2005) himself claims, he is not worried whether these intelligences can be tested and validated. His efforts are towards establishing the reality that humans have multiple intelligences which have to be considered before dubbing a person intelligent or not.

1.4.1 THE THEORY OF ‘SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE’ THAT INSPIRED ‘EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE’

Even before Gardner or Weschler, the traditional belief that intelligence pertains to cognitive abilities such as memory and problem solving (Cherniss, 2000) was challenged
upon as early as the 1920’s when Thorndike spoke about ‘Social Intelligence’ – “an ability to understand men and women, boys and girls – to act wisely in human relations” (as cited by Salovey and Mayer, 1990). Thorndike moved away from the traditional concepts of intelligence in believing that it is not only a person’s reasoning and logical prowess, but also his ability to recognize his own and others’ intentions and motives and act accordingly. He classified intelligence into three facets based on a person’s ability to understand and manage

- ideas (abstract intelligence),
- concrete objects (mechanical intelligence), and
- people (social intelligence) (Kihlstrom and Cantor, 2000).

Though the concept of social intelligence paved way to theories which insisted on recognizing other latent skills in a person, it was not successful or convincing. It definitely changed the way people perceived intelligence, but failed to distinguish itself as a distinct form of intelligence. As Cronbach (1960) declared, “fifty years of intermittent investigation… social intelligence remains undefined and unmeasured.” Thorndike himself acknowledged the fact “whether there is any unitary trait corresponding to social intelligence remains to be demonstrated.” (as cited by Salovey and Mayer, 1990). This inability to distinguish social intelligence as a distinct intellectual entity, led to a declining interest in this theory, but, fortunately, research was revived with Guilford’s ‘Structure of Intellect model’ in 1967. The general public also acknowledged the significance of social intelligence. When asked by Sternberg and his colleagues (1981) to list the qualities which they (the laymen) considered essential in an intelligent person, traits like making fair judgments, sensitive to others’ needs, displaying interest in the world at large, admitting mistakes, etc. were listed out (Kihlstrom and Cantor, 2000). Fascinated and intrigued by these findings, two professors of psychology, Peter Salovey from Yale University and John Mayer from the University of Hampshire, took the research further and introduced the concept of ‘Emotional Intelligence’ (EI). They presented it as a subset of social intelligence (Salovey and Mayer, 1990) and defined EI as an “ability to monitor one’s own and others’
feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and use this information to guide one’s thinking and action”. They went ahead distinguishing EI from other types of intelligences and presented a framework, a set of skills they believed that helped people in regulating emotions – in one’s own self and others. They also believed that emotions can be intellectually analyzed and realized which eventually led to the development of what is now known as the ‘ability model’ – the only one to date. The other models are the mixed ability models that were conceptualized later by Bar-On, Goleman, et al. which included certain personality traits as well.

1.4.2 THE ORIGINATION OF ‘EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE’

The field of emotional intelligence is a fairly new one – the word ‘emotional intelligence’ itself was coined first and used in literary writing by Peter Salovey and John Mayer in 1990 (Cherniss, 2000). The concept has become immensely popular as it explains and provides evidence on how people with a good IQ sometimes fail and those who were school dropouts and considered stupid go on to become the most successful ones in their fields (Goleman, 1995). Some of the forerunners in the research on emotional intelligence – John Mayer, Peter Salovey, David Caruso, David Goleman, Reuven Bar-On – list out various characteristics which decide a person’s emotional intelligence. While Mayer and Salovey (1990) take EI as a purely cognitive ability, Goleman and Reuven Bar-On view it as a personality trait. Mayer and Salovey’s four branch model of EI lays emphasis on emotional perception, emotional assimilation, understanding and management (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004), whereas Reuven Bar-On (2002) agrees on the qualities of emotional self-awareness, self-actualization, interpersonal relationship, reality testing, stress tolerance, optimism, happiness, etc. as those that decide the emotional intelligence of a person. Goleman (1998) on the other hand points out to emotional self awareness, self control, empathy, problem solving, conflict management, leadership, etc. as the characteristics of an emotionally intelligent person. The mixed ability model proposed by Reuven Bar-On emphasizes how the personality traits influence a person’s general wellbeing and Goleman’s model focuses on workplace success (Stys & Brown, 2004). Mayer and Salovey’s four branch model understands emotional intelligence as a cognitive ability and
presents the four levels through which a person becomes emotionally intelligent. They being,

- Emotional Perception
- Emotional Assimilation
- Emotional Understanding and
- Emotional Management

The first step – emotional perception – is an 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 – emotional assimilation, which is to distinguish between the different emotions he is undergoing and also identify those emotions that affect his thought process. This ability leads him to – emotional understanding – an ability to understand complex emotions and also to recognize the transition from one emotion to another. By then, he becomes adept in dealing with his emotions and thus is able to manage his emotions by connecting to or disconnecting from any emotion at any given situation. This gives him complete control over his impulses and is thus able to think, analyze and behave rationally in any situation. The entire process is purely an intellectual procedure. Emotions are understood and controlled through intellectual prowess. In contrast, Reuven Bar-On and Goleman propose the mixed ability models which include certain personality traits as well. Bar-On’s (2002) model of emotional intelligence relates to the potential for performance and success, rather than performance or success itself, and is considered process-oriented rather than outcome-oriented. It strives to identify in a person the latent capability of being emotionally intelligent. His model outlines the following five components –

- Intrapersonal
- Interpersonal
- Adaptability
- Stress management and
- General mood components (Bar-On, 2002)
These components are similar to Mayer and Salovey’s model on emotional self-awareness, self-control, self-expression, and empathy, but along with these aspects, Bar-On includes reality testing, - the ability to assess the relation between the emotionally experienced and the actual nature of an object, stress tolerance, and the strength to stay happy and optimistic in the face of adversity. Goleman’s model deviates slightly as he includes organizational awareness, leadership, teamwork and collaboration along with self-awareness, self-control and empathy, as his focus is on workplace success.

The following chapter discusses the above mentioned three models in detail, as it gives the literature review of the theory. The literature review is done in two segments, the first segment discussing the theory as it is perceived and developed in the Western countries, and the second segment focusing on how the concept emotional intelligence has existed time immemorial and is a way of life in the Indian subcontinent. To substantiate, it brings instances from the Bhagavad-Gita where emotional intelligence is discussed in the conversation between Krishna and Arjuna (characters from the Mahabharata).