

Indian and Western Perspective of Emotions: A Comparative Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Emotions are crucial to our understanding of self and outer world. Being conscious of our emotions can help us navigate life more steadily and easily. It has been observed that emotions have an adaptive value, assisting us in completing basic daily activities. The importance of emotions in our daily lives cannot be understated. All of our beliefs and behaviors are shaped by our emotional experiences, which also serve as a reflection of our emotions. This paper attempts to understand Indian as well as western perspective of emotions. The Indian classical literature describes emotions as *Navrasas* as compared to the *basic emotions* in the western thought. In this paper, attempt has been made to understand whether how emotions have been understood in Indian philosophy and whether this understanding is similar to those of western theorists.

Keywords: *Indian, Western Perspective, Emotions*

Emotion is a multifaceted experience of awareness, physical feeling, and behavior that expresses the individual meaning of an object, an occasion, or a situation. They can be understood as our reactions to stimuli, external or internal, which can either be pleasant or unpleasant. Such reactions may arise when we are either frustrated or satisfied with an event. The circumstances, which a person finds oneself in, often determine the kind of emotions one would experience. Our daily lives are significantly impacted by our emotions. Whether we are happy, angry, depressed, bored, or dissatisfied, it influences the decisions we make. We also select interests and pastimes according to the feelings they arouse. Being aware of our emotions can make navigating life easier and more stable. Emotions have been seen to have adaptive value, helping us deal with fundamental life tasks. We cannot overlook the significance of emotions in our daily lives. Our emotional experiences dictate all of our thoughts and behaviors and in turn our ideas and behaviors are a reflection of our emotions. They also have a big impact on our life since they help us become ready for action and mold how we will react to things in the future. They help us connect with others. The quality of our social interactions is also influenced by how we handle our emotions and emotional experiences. Our experiences, upbringing, and cultural background all influence how we psychologically evaluate a scenario. As a result, different people may react emotionally to comparable situations in various ways.

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In everyday language, we use the terms emotions, feelings and mood interchangeably, however, they are not the same thing. Emotion is defined as “a complex reaction pattern, involving experiential, behavioral and physiological elements.” People respond to issues or circumstances that they personally think relevant based on their emotions. Subjective experience, physiological reaction, and behavioral or expressive response are the three parts of emotional experiences along with almost universal facial expressions. Feelings are conscious experiences often brought by emotional experiences and physical sensations. Emotions, on the other hand, may be originate from unconscious mind. Thus, emotions give rise to feelings, which can be impacted by memories, convictions, and other elements. Mood can be understood as any short lived, low intensity emotional experience. They may not have any reference point. For example, a person can be in sad, happy or even angry mood without any apparent reason.

The origin of emotions

The English term ‘emotion’ comes from the Latin *emovere* or *exmovere* (‘to move out’, ‘move away’, ‘remove’, ‘stir up’, ‘agitate’). In the western thought, it was Aristotle who discussed emotions extensively in his ethical and psychological treatises (Billimoria & Wenta, 2015). The "Nicomachean Ethics," one of his works believed to have been written around 350 BCE, has the most thorough explanation of his theory of emotions. One of Aristotle's key writings on ethics and the well-being of humans, this essay delves into the nature of emotions. Aristotle's preferred the term *pathos* for emotions referring to passive states which are considered as "disturbances" or "movements" of the soul. He believed they involve both physiological arousal and cognitive appraisal. He viewed emotions as complex psychological states that arise from the interplay of our judgments, desires, and bodily sensations. Aristotle highlighted the strong relationship between emotions and reason, in contrast to Plato, who frequently viewed emotions as illogical and disruptive. He maintained that our beliefs, perceptions, and assessments of circumstances all have an impact on our emotions. Aristotle distinguished between positive and negative emotions according to how well they accorded with virtue and reason. For instance, recklessness is a negative emotion because it lacks rational control, whereas courage is a positive emotion since it is consistent with bravery. Aristotle recognized the physiological alterations that coincide with emotional experiences and acknowledged the physiological component of emotions. He connected the psychological experience of emotions with these physiological alterations. Aristotle's primary concern in ethics was the good life, which included cultivating virtues for the "political zoon"—man of perfection. In this regard, emotions played a significant role for him. The Greek philosopher focused on a narrow spectrum of emotions, including pleasure (undesired emotions), *akrasia* (moral weakness), *eros* (desirable emotion), and the ultimate good of *eudaimonia*, which is the fulfillment or happiness that one's life is measured by. *Eudaimonia* is the result of moral training (self-control and cultivation of the worthy emotions) (Billimoria & Wenta, 2015).

Our knowledge about emotions has significantly grown since the times of Greek philosophers. Evolutionary psychologists, in particular, believe that emotions are the outcome of natural selection. They are considered as an adaptive way of dealing with challenges. Fear keeps us safe from dangerous situations whereas anger helps in thwarting off any threat and danger. Darwin (1965) believed that the expression of emotions in human beings is similar to that of primates leading to the understanding that the expression of emotions is innate rather than learned. He believed that the facial expressions of emotions were universal and hereditary. However, his view was challenged behaviourists who believed that though there were some similarities in the facial expressions of happiness and crying between western and Chinese expressions, anger and surprise were different in their facial expressions (Ekman,

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1973). The display rules of emotional expression may vary according to the culture. It was also observed that humans have the ability to mask the emotion being experienced by them. A person may be sad but may not be displaying the expressions of sadness as per the cultural norms; rather maintaining a neutral expression or even a smiling face. A smiling face doesn't necessarily mean that the person is happy; rather he is trying to mask the actual emotion of sadness. Thus, this ability to mask an emotional expression gives support to the universality of the facial expressions. Tomkins (1962) suggested that the number of emotions having specific distinctive features may be relatively small. He suggested that anger, interest, contempt, disgust, distress, fear, joy, shame, surprise show distinctive facial expressions and hence, considered them to be basic emotions. Ekman & Friesen (1975) suggested that each of the basic emotions may not be considered as a single entity; rather belonging to '*emotion families*.' Each basic emotion is considered a family of related states, sharing common characteristics such as expressions, physiological activity, and antecedent events. For example, the "anger family" includes over 60 different anger expressions, each sharing certain muscular features but varying based on control, spontaneity, and the provoking event.

Different theorists have proposed varying numbers of basic emotions, ranging from as few as two to as many as eighteen (Ortony & Turner, 1990). Examples include:

- **Mowrer (1960):** Two basic emotions –pleasure and pain.
- **Watson (1930):** Three basic emotions – fear, love, and rage.
- **Izard (1971):** Ten basic emotions- Anger, contempt, disgust, distress, fear, guilt, interest, joy, shame, surprise
- **Plutchik (1980):** Eight basic emotions– Joy, sadness, acceptance, disgust, fear, anger, surprise, and anticipation.
- **Panksepp (1982):** Four basic emotions – expectancy, fear, rage, and panic.
- **Kemper (1987):** Four basic emotions – fear, anger, depression, and satisfaction.
- **Oatley & Johnson-Laird (1987):** Five basic emotions – happiness, sadness, anxiety, anger, and disgust.
- **Frijda (1986):** Eighteen basic emotions, including arrogance, humility, indifference, anger, fear, and sorrow.
- **Ekman (1992a):** Six basic emotions- happiness, sadness, anger, fear, disgust and surprise

Ekman (1992a) proposed that there are a set of basic emotions that are universally recognized across different cultures. The term "basic" has three meanings (Ekman, 1999). The term "basic" differentiates emotions that are distinct from each other in appraisal, antecedent events, behavioral responses, physiology, and other characteristics. This contrasts with the view that emotions are fundamentally the same, differing only in intensity or pleasantness. The second meaning refers to the evolutionary perspective, where emotions evolved for their adaptive value in dealing with fundamental life tasks. This view emphasizes innate factors over species-constant or species-variable learning. The third meaning describes basic emotions as elements that combine to form more complex or compound emotions. However, this meaning is less emphasized in current basic emotion frameworks.

The six basic emotions described by Ekman are:

- 1) **Happiness:** Characterized by feelings of pleasure and contentment. Facial expressions include smiling and a relaxed, open demeanor.
- 2) **Sadness:** Associated with feelings of loss and disappointment. Facial expressions include frowning, drooping upper eyelids, and a downturned mouth.

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- 3) **Fear:** Triggered by the perception of threat or danger. Facial expressions include widened eyes and an open mouth.
- 4) **Disgust:** A response to something considered revolting or offensive. Facial expressions include a wrinkled nose, raised upper lip, and a look of revulsion.
- 5) **Anger:** Elicited by perceived injustice or frustration. Facial expressions include furrowed brows, a clenched jaw, and a glaring look.
- 6) **Surprise:** A reaction to unexpected events. Facial expressions include raised eyebrows, widened eyes, and an open mouth.

Ekman's research involved studying facial expressions across various cultures to determine if these basic emotions were universally recognized. His studies included remote tribes with little exposure to Western media, and he found that people from these tribes could accurately recognize the basic emotions from facial expressions, supporting the universality of these emotions. To further the research, Ekman & Friesen (1978) developed the Facial Action Coding System (FACS), a comprehensive tool for categorizing the physical expression of emotions. FACS breaks down facial expressions into individual components of muscle movement, called Action Units (AUs). By analyzing these AUs, researchers can determine the specific emotions being expressed.

While Ekman's theory has been highly influential, it has also faced criticism. Some researchers argue that emotions are more complex and culturally specific than Ekman suggests. They believe that social and cultural factors play a significant role in how emotions are experienced and expressed.

Complex emotions

The basic emotions—that is, whether the other emotions are actually all founded on these six—have been the subject of debate among psychologists. Additionally, some have contested the existence of the fundamental emotions, arguing that they are only components of more complex psychological states and that it is these more intricate states that are more deserving of the term "emotions." While basic emotions (or primary emotions) are considered to be universal and biologically hardwired, complex emotions (or secondary emotions) are seen as combinations of basic emotions and are influenced by social and cultural factors. For instance, love combines tenderness, joy, devotion, and passion, whereas hatred combines rage, fear, and disgust. Grief is a blend of surprise, denial, despair, and rage (Brogaard, 2018). The expression of grief is often influenced by the cultural factors. Some cultures may insist upon openly exhibiting grief and may hire individuals to aid in the grief process, for example in India, professional mourners (Rudaali) were hired for mourning the death of social elites (Thomas & Sebastian, 2022). Complex or secondary emotions are learned during development, exhibit individual and cultural variance, and are perceptive to the stimulus situation's more nuanced and abstract aspects (Griffiths, 2003). A complex emotion may also be understood as a self-conscious emotion which requires self-reflection and self-evaluation.

Some of the complex emotions have been described below:

1. **Guilt:** A feeling of responsibility or remorse for some offense, crime, wrong, etc., whether real or imagined. Often involves a mix of sadness and fear.
2. **Shame:** A painful emotion caused by consciousness of guilt, shortcoming, or impropriety. Combines feelings of embarrassment, guilt, and self-disgust.

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- 3. Jealousy:** A complex emotion that encompasses feelings ranging from fear of abandonment to rage and humiliation. Involves a combination of anger, sadness, and fear.
- 4. Envy:** A feeling of discontent or covetousness with regard to another's advantages, success, possessions, etc. Often involves feelings of resentment and longing.
- 5. Pride:** A feeling of deep pleasure or satisfaction derived from one's own achievements, the achievements of one's close associates, or from qualities or possessions that are widely admired. Involves happiness and self-respect.
- 6. Embarrassment:** A feeling of self-consciousness, shame, or awkwardness. Involves a mix of fear, shame, and sometimes amusement.
- 7. Love:** A profound and caring affection towards someone. Involves a mix of happiness, contentment, and desire.
- 8. Gratitude:** A feeling of thankfulness and appreciation. Often involves happiness and relief.
- 9. Sympathy:** Feelings of pity and sorrow for someone else's misfortune. Combines sadness and compassion.
- 10. Empathy:** The ability to understand and share the feelings of another. Involves a mix of compassion, sadness, and sometimes joy, depending on the other's emotional state.
- 11. Disappointment:** Sadness or displeasure caused by the non-fulfillment of one's hopes or expectations. Involves sadness and sometimes surprise.
- 12. Regret:** A feeling of sadness, repentance, or disappointment over something that has happened or been done. Combines sadness and guilt.

Emotions in Indian perspective

Different cultures have specific rules about which emotions can be expressed openly and how they should be displayed. These rules, known as display rules, dictate the appropriateness of expressing certain emotions in various social contexts. For example, in many Asian cultures, there is a tendency to suppress negative emotions to maintain social harmony, whereas in Western cultures, expressing one's emotions openly is often encouraged. Display rules can vary depending on the context (e.g., family, work, public) and the relationship between the individuals involved (e.g., close friends, strangers, authority figures). Cultures that value individualism (e.g., the United States) often emphasize personal expression and individual achievement, leading to more open displays of emotions. In contrast, collectivist cultures (e.g., Japan) prioritize group harmony and collective well-being, which can result in more restrained emotional expressions.

In eastern, particularly Indian philosophy, emotions have been described in detail in *Bharatmuni's Natyashastra* which is the world's oldest treatise on the performing arts in the world (Hejmadi, Davidson & Rozin, 2000). This text is believed by many historians and philosophers to have been written around 500 BCE. The sixth and seventh chapters of *Natyashastra* deal with comprehensive *Rasa* and *Bhava* theory. The word *Rasa* is derived from the root '*rasah*' meaning sap or juice, taste, flavour, or relish. The extract of a fruit is referred to as '*rasa*,' which itself is the essence of it, the ultimate flavour of it (Thiagarajan, n.d.). *Rasa* is best described as a dynamic interaction involving the creator (the artist), the artistic expression (the piece of art), and the audience (the people who view it). When an artist feels something, he is so overcome by it that he looks for a way to communicate it. The audience or spectators who are looking at the artist's work experience the same emotion that the artist felt since they are receiving it through the artist's medium. The degree to which the viewer feels the same feeling as the author depends on the viewers' cultural background as well as the creator's sensibility in presenting the work. "*Rasa* is so called because it is capable

of being tasted (*asvadayanti*)," says Bharata. An aesthetic delight arises from a state of mind that is a result of a confluence of several emotional elements. He said that "the cultured people taste the dominant states (*Sthayi bhaavas*) as they observe them being represented by an expression of the various states with words, gestures, and temperament and derive pleasure and satisfaction, just as well-disposed persons while eating food, cooked with many kinds of spices, enjoy (*asvadayanti*) the tastes and attain pleasure and satisfaction." Bharata calls human soul as *Bhaava-Jagat* (the world of emotions). "Bhaava" is derived from the root 'bhu'-bhavati, that is, 'to become', 'to come into existence'. The term bhava means mental state, feelings, psychological states, and emotions. In the context of the drama, bhavas are the emotions represented in the performance (Mohan, n.d.). Rasa is the spectator's emotional reaction to the bhavas. Rasa is therefore an artistically altered emotional state that the viewer experiences. Such emotions alter viewers' perceptions, foster empathy, heighten sensitivity, and facilitate an open mind and heart to comprehend the play's concept and message. Humans naturally experience these emotional states. Since they are innate and intelligible even in the absence of context, they are basic. Their intensity comes from their ability to control and dictate behavior.

Bhava is that which becomes rasa. Bhavas by themselves carry no meaning in the absence of Rasa. There are three types of *Bhaava*, as proposed by Bharat, namely, *Sthayi* (Pervading stable emotions, eight types), *Vyabhichari* (thirty three), and *Satvika* (eight), making a total of forty-nine. The eight *sthayi* (stable) bhaavas are: 1. **Rati** (Pleasure) (love) 2. **Hasa** (Joy) 3. **Shoka** (Sorrow) (grief) 4. **Krodha** (Malice) 5. **Utsaha** (Courage) (heroism) 6. **Bhaya** (Fear) 7. **Jugupsa** (Disgust) and 8. **Vismaya** (Surprise).

The fleeting, transient emotions are known as the *vyabhichari bhaavas* which are dependent on the psychological states of mind. These *vyabhichari bhaavas* serve to enrich the *rasas*. *Vyabhichari Bhaavas* are thirty three in number: *Nirveda* (Despondency), *Glani* (Weakness), *Shanka* (Suspicious), *Asuya* (envy), *Mada* (Inebriation), *Srama* (exhaustion), *Alasya* (lethargy), *Dainya* (Depression), *Chinta* (anxiety), *Moha* (delusion), *Smrti* (recollection), *Dhrti* (fortitude), *Vrida* (Bashfulness), *Chapalata* (inconstancy), *Harsa* (joy), *Avega* (excitement), *Jadata* (Stupefaction), *Garva* (Arrogance), *Visada* (Despair), *Autsukya* (impatient curiosity), *Nidra* (sleep), *Apasmara* (Loss of memory), *Svapna* (Dreaming), *Prabodha* (Wakening), *Amarsa* (indignation), *Avahittha* (Dissimulation), *Ugrata* (Cruelty), *Mati* (self assurance), *Vyadhi* (Sickness), *Unmada* (madness), *Marana* (death), *Trasa* (fright), and *Vitarka* (deliberation).

There are eight *Sattvika Bhaavas* in all. They are the outward/physical expression of a strong emotion. *Sthambha* (Paralysis), *Sveda* (Sweating profusely), *Romancha* (horripilation), *Svarabheda* (change in the voice), *Vaipathu* (Trembling), *Vaivarnya* (change of color), *Ashru* (Shedding tears) and *Pralaya* (Loss of Sense, fainting).

Corresponding to the eight *sthayi bhaavas*, Bharata proposed eight rasas namely, the Erotic (sringara), the Comic (Hasya) the Pathetic (Karunayam), the Furious (Raudram), the Heroic (Veeram), the Terrible (Bhayanakam), the Odious (Bibhatasam), and the Marvelous (Adbhutam). Their equivalent bhaavas are *rati*, *haasya*, *shoka*, *krodha*, *utsah*, *bhaya*, *jugupsha*, and *visamya*. The concept of the ninth Rasa *shanta* or *shantam* (peace) was a later interpolation by the Kashmiri Shaivist Abhinavagupta (10th Century AD) (Mukhopadhyaya, 2022). Thus, these nine rasas came to be known as *Navrasa*.

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These nine emotions are foundational in Indian classical arts and are used to convey a wide range of human experiences and feelings. They are not only essential for performers but also provide a framework for understanding and appreciating the emotional depth of various art forms. The Navarasas, or the nine emotions in Indian philosophy, are not confined to classical arts but are also deeply woven into the fabric of everyday life. They can be expressed in various forms:

1) Śṛīṅgāra (Love):

- **Romantic Relationships:** Expressed through affection, caring gestures, and intimate moments shared between partners.
- **Parental Love:** The unconditional love and nurturing nature of parents towards their children.
- **Friendship:** Warmth, loyalty, and support among friends.

2) Hāsya (Laughter):

- **Humor and Jokes:** Laughing at jokes, playful teasing, and sharing funny stories with friends and family.
- **Entertainment:** Enjoying comedies in movies, TV shows, or live performances.
- **Light-hearted Moments:** Finding joy in simple, everyday occurrences and interactions.

3) Raudra (Anger):

- **Conflict:** Arguments or disagreements in personal or professional settings.
- **Frustration:** Feeling anger when things don't go as planned or when faced with obstacles.
- **Injustice:** Righteous anger against unfair treatment or social injustices.

4) Karuṇa (Compassion):

- **Empathy:** Feeling and responding to the suffering or struggles of others.
- **Helping Others:** Acts of kindness, charity, and providing support to those in need.
- **Personal Loss:** Experiencing and expressing sorrow during times of personal grief or loss.

5) Bibhatsa (Disgust):

- **Aversion to Unpleasant Things:** Reacting to bad smells, sights, or tastes.
- **Moral Disgust:** Feeling repulsed by unethical or immoral behavior.
- **Health and Hygiene:** Maintaining cleanliness and avoiding unsanitary conditions.

6) Bhayānaka (Fear):

- **Dangerous Situations:** Experiencing fear during accidents, emergencies, or threatening events.
- **Anxiety:** Daily worries about work, health, or personal issues.
- **Phobias:** Specific fears such as fear of heights, darkness, or certain animals.

7) Vīra (Courage):

- **Facing Challenges:** Standing up to challenges at work, school, or in personal life.
- **Bravery in Adversity:** Showing resilience and strength in difficult times.
- **Acts of Heroism:** Performing brave acts, whether in everyday life or during crises.

8) **Adbhuta (Wonder):**

- **Natural Beauty:** Awe inspired by nature, such as sunsets, mountains, or the ocean.
- **New Experiences:** The excitement and curiosity of exploring new places, cultures, or learning new things.
- **Innovation and Creativity:** Amazement at technological advancements or artistic expressions.

9) **Śānta (Peace):**

- **Meditation and Mindfulness:** Practices that promote inner peace and tranquility.
- **Contentment:** Feeling satisfaction and contentment with life as it is.
- **Harmony:** Living in harmony with oneself, others, and the environment.

These emotions are universal and resonate with human experiences across cultures. The *Navarasas* are universal because they reflect fundamental human emotions that are experienced across all cultures and societies. They resonate with the shared human condition, transcending linguistic and cultural barriers, and are expressed through various forms of art, literature, and daily life. This universality underscores the shared emotional experiences that unite humanity, regardless of geographical or cultural differences. These *navrasas* are comparable to the basic emotions as proposed in western thought as they show universality irrespective of a person's cultural and social factors.

While the *Navarasas* are foundational and often highlighted in classical arts and performance, Indian philosophical texts, literature, and spiritual traditions explore a broader spectrum of human emotions and states of mind. These emotions may be seen as comparable to the complex emotions as described in western literature. Some of these emotions are:

1. **Bhakti (Devotion)**- a deep sense of devotion and love towards a deity or higher power
2. **Māna (Pride/Self- respect)**- a sense of self-respect, dignity, and sometimes positive pride
3. **Matsarya (Jealousy/Envy)**- feelings of jealousy or envy towards others' success or possessions, **Dvesha (Hatred)**- intense dislike or hatred towards someone or something
4. **Mada (Arrogance/Intoxication)**- sense of arrogance or intoxication by power, wealth, or success
5. **Moha (Delusion/Attachment)**- delusion or excessive attachment to worldly things,
6. **Shoka (Grief)**- deep sorrow or grief, especially due to loss or suffering
7. **Viraha (Separation/Pining)**-the emotional pain and longing due to separation from a loved one
8. **Ananda (Bliss)**- a state of supreme happiness and bliss, often associated with spiritual realization.

CONCLUSION

Both traditions recognize the universality of emotions but differ in their emphasis. Indian thought often highlights universal emotional experiences (*rasas*), whereas Western psychology tends to focus on individual differences and subjective experiences. Cultural practices in India, such as festivals, rituals, and arts, are deeply emotional and communal, reflecting the collective nature of emotional expression. Western cultures may prioritize individual emotional experiences and personal expression. Indian and Western thought provide rich and complementary perspectives on emotions. Indian philosophy's integration of

emotions with spirituality offers a holistic view, while Western approaches provide detailed psychological insights. Together, these perspectives enhance our understanding of the complex and multifaceted nature of human emotions.

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Conflict of Interest

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