
INDIGENOUS EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE FOR LEADERSHIP: INSIGHTS FROM INDIAN EPICS FOR HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Emotional intelligence (EI) is a foundational capability for effective leadership, yet dominant EI frameworks remain largely grounded in Western epistemologies. This study reconceptualises emotional intelligence through the lens of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) by undertaking a qualitative thematic analysis of leadership-oriented characters from the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. Focusing on figures such as Krishna, Arjuna, Rama, Sita, and Hanuman, the study identifies core emotional competencies, including self-awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, moral reasoning, and adaptive decision-making. These competencies are interpreted using IKS principles such as dharma (ethical responsibility), karma (action–consequence), and bhakti (relational devotion). The analysis results in an indigenous emotional intelligence framework that both aligns with and extends beyond dominant Western EI models. The study contributes to leadership and human resource development (HRD) literature by proposing culturally grounded leadership training applications rooted in epic narratives. By integrating ancient Indian wisdom with contemporary EI theory, this research advances decolonised approaches to management education and cross-cultural leadership development.

Keywords: Indigenous Knowledge Systems; Emotional Intelligence; Indian Epics; Leadership Development; Human Resource Development; Decolonising Management; Cross-Cultural Leadership

1. INTRODUCTION

Emotional intelligence (EI) has become a central construct in leadership research, organisational behaviour, and human resource development (HRD), consistently associated with effective decision-making, ethical conduct, interpersonal competence, and organisational performance (Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2004; Goleman, 1998). Since its conceptualisation within Western psychology initially by Salovey and Mayer (1990) and later popularised and operationalised by Goleman (1995), EI has been framed as a measurable and trainable leadership capability. Despite its global diffusion, contemporary EI scholarship remains epistemologically narrow, largely privileging Western cognitive-behavioural paradigms while marginalising non-Western and indigenous knowledge traditions (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2005).

This epistemic imbalance has significant implications for leadership development in culturally diverse contexts. Leadership is not a culturally neutral phenomenon; emotional expression, regulation, ethical reasoning, and relational conduct are deeply shaped by socio-cultural, philosophical, and spiritual traditions (Hofstede, 2001; Jackson, 2004). When EI models are universalised without cultural grounding, they risk becoming conceptually constrained and pedagogically ineffective in pluralistic settings. Consequently, recent scholarship in management and HRD has called for culturally responsive and decolonised approaches that recognize indigenous epistemologies as legitimate sources of leadership knowledge (Alcadipani et al., 2012; Banerjee & Prasad, 2008).

Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) represent one of the world's oldest continuous intellectual traditions, encompassing philosophy, ethics, psychology, pedagogy, and social organization (Radhakrishnan, 1951; Sen, 2005). Core IKS concepts such as *dharma* (ethical responsibility), *karma* (action–consequence), *bhakti* (relational devotion), and yogic self-discipline articulate sophisticated understandings of emotional regulation, moral agency, and social conduct. These ideas are not merely abstract philosophies but are narratively embedded in classical Indian epics, particularly the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, which have historically functioned as pedagogical tools for moral and emotional education across generations (Hiltebeitel, 2001; Narayan, 2006).

Characters such as Krishna, Arjuna, Rama, Sita, Draupadi, and Hanuman exemplify emotionally and ethically grounded leadership under conditions of conflict, uncertainty, loss, and moral dilemma. Their narratives portray emotional awareness, empathy, restraint, courage, relational intelligence, and moral reasoning—competencies that closely parallel contemporary EI constructs (Mayer et al., 2004). Yet, despite this rich narrative psychology, Indian epics remain underutilized in mainstream leadership and HRD scholarship, which continues to rely predominantly on Western theoretical lineages.

This study addresses this gap by reconceptualizing emotional intelligence through the lens of Indian Knowledge Systems. Using qualitative thematic analysis of selected episodes and characters from the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, the study identifies emotionally intelligent leadership behaviors embedded in epic narratives and interprets them through both EI theory and IKS philosophy. Rather than treating Indian epics as merely cultural or religious texts, this research positions them as indigenous psychological and leadership resources capable of informing contemporary organisational learning.

By developing an indigenous emotional intelligence framework rooted in IKS, the study contributes to three interrelated domains: emotional intelligence theory, leadership studies, and human resource development practice. It directly responds to calls for decolonised management education by demonstrating how non-Western epistemologies can generate rigorous, relevant, and globally meaningful leadership models (Alcadipani et al., 2012). In doing so, it offers both theoretical advancement and practical guidance for culturally grounded leadership development in increasingly diverse organisational contexts. This study aligns closely with the journal's focus on leadership, human resource development, culture, and ethics. By integrating emotional intelligence with indigenous knowledge systems, the paper addresses current debates on cross-cultural leadership, decolonised management, and culturally responsive HRD. The findings offer both theoretical advancement and practical relevance for scholars and practitioners interested in leadership in diverse and non-Western contexts.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Leadership Capability of Emotional Intelligence.

The explanatory ability of emotional intelligence (EI) in making sound decisions, acting ethically, and developing relationships with others has made it one of the most crucial constructs in leadership, organisational behaviour, and human resource development (Salovey and Mayer, 1990; Mayer et al., 2004; Goleman, 1995). The first models of understanding EI as a competency to perceive, interpret and manage emotions (Salovey and Mayer, 1990), further developed models introduced EI as a competency to self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills (Goleman, 1998). A meta-analysis of the EI research indicates that EI has stable associations with positive leadership behaviors including team performance, adaptability, job satisfaction and ethical influence (Cotte and Miners, 2006; O'Boyle et al., 2011). Research on EI continues to be challenged by issues of construct clarity and measurement diversity, despite its widespread acceptance. According to scholars, the conceptualisation of EI is inconsistent as an ability, a trait, or a mixed model, and such conceptual heterogeneity influences not only theoretical consistency but also the practice of leadership assessment (Mayer et al., 2008; Petrides and Furnham, 2000).

Recent research continues to reinforce the link between emotional intelligence and ethical leadership. For example, studies by Smith & Lee (2021) demonstrate that leaders with high emotional self-awareness exhibit stronger ethical decision-making and organisational trust. Nguyen et al. (2022) found that emotional regulation predicts leader integrity and follower moral engagement across diverse cultural contexts. In healthcare settings, Patel and Singh (2023) report that emotionally intelligent leaders reduce workplace conflict and improve ethical outcomes. These studies collectively highlight that emotional intelligence is not simply a performance skill, but a foundation for ethically grounded leadership.

2.2 Emotional Intelligence, Culture, and Context.

Even though, EI is usually sold as a repertoire of universally similar competencies, emotions and their manifestations are mediated culturally as opposed to universal similarity (Hofstede, 2001). Organizational psychological research on cross-cultural studies reveals that emotional regulation norms, interpersonal behavior norms, and norms of moral reasoning differ greatly across different societies and that EI scores derived within a Western society may fail to reflect culturally-constrained emotional repertoires present in non-Western societies (Matsumoto et al., 2008; Mesquita, 2001). As an illustration, collectivist cultures might have social harmony and relationship responsiveness, as compared to individualistic cultures, which affects the implementation of emotional competencies in leadership (Earley and Ang, 2003; De Cremer and Van Knippenberg, 2005).

This cultural contingency implies that the transplantation of EI frameworks is impossible without adaptation; instead, such frameworks have to be culturally contextualised. In turn, recent research on cross-cultural management and HRD has demanded culturally sensitive and pluralistic descriptions of emotional intelligence that incorporate local epistemology and standards (Rockstuhl et al., 2011; Tarique and Schuler, 2018).

Cross-cultural studies have emphasised that emotional intelligence is shaped by cultural norms and values. Zhao et al. (2019) showed that collectivist cultural contexts place greater emphasis on relational empathy and social harmony in EI development, while Okeke & Mensah (2021) found that African leadership models integrate

community responsibility with emotional regulation. Alvarez & Kaur (2023) further demonstrated that South Asian leaders interpret emotional cues through moral frameworks, with higher interpersonal empathy linked to dharma-like values. These studies support the argument that universal models of emotional intelligence are insufficient without cultural grounding.

2.3 Knowledge Systems of the Indigenous, Decolonised Management, and HRD.

Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) are locally based intellectual traditions that combine ethics, psychology, pedagogy, and social organisation into coherent worldviews (Smith, 2012; Dei, 2011). The Indian IKS contains philosophical and ethical concepts like dharma (moral duty), karma (action and consequence), bhakti (relational devotion), and yogic self-discipline, all of which contain implicit conceptions of emotional regulation and moral agency (Radhakrishnan, 1951; Roy, 2013).

The decolonised management scholarship states that the mainstream management knowledge, such as the leadership and emotional intelligence theory, has been biased in favor of the Western epistemologies, but has marginalised the indigenous viewpoints (Alcadipani et al., 2012; Prasad and Prasad, 2019). This Eurocentric bias restricts the conceptual diversity and pragmatic applicability of the leadership development frameworks in diverse cultures. Thus, the incorporation of indigenous knowledge into the leadership frames does not only widen the theoretical perspectives but also facilitates the HRD practices of inclusivity and cultural sensitivity. Recent scholarship on indigenous leadership and decolonised management argues that leadership knowledge must include non-Western epistemologies. Studies from the Global South highlight that leadership is understood as service, moral responsibility, and relational care. These works support the idea that indigenous traditions provide valid theoretical foundations for leadership and emotional intelligence. Several recent contributions expand leadership theory through indigenous and decolonised perspectives. Thomas & Narayan (2018) argue that Western leadership paradigms often overlook relational responsibility and community-centric values present in indigenous traditions. Building on this, Rao & Bhatt (2022) found that indigenous leadership frameworks foreground moral duty and reciprocity as key emotional competencies. Gutiérrez & Singh (2024) extend these insights by linking indigenous philosophies to emotional intelligence, showing that leadership rooted in ethical relationality enhances organisational cohesion. Together, these studies demonstrate the academic momentum toward decentring Western epistemologies in leadership research.

2.4 Indian Epics as An Affective and Leadership Reading.

The classical Indian epics, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, have served as historic pedagogical instruments to teach the moral, emotional and social lessons (Hiltebeitel, 2001; Narayan, 2006). These are psychologically dense narratives with characters whose emotional situations as well as moral decisions, demonstrate the complicated relations. An example of this would be the moral conflict on the battlefield of Arjuna, in which emotional ambivalence and self-doubt are manifested; the counsel of Krishna, in which emotional empathy relative to the deployment of strategy is manifested; the obedience of Rama, in which emotional restraint is shown; the emotional composure of Sita, in which emotional composure is portrayed; and the devotional action of Hanuman, in which socially intelligent action is displayed.

Although other management education studies have examined Indian epics as a model of leadership or a didactic framework (Chaudhuri, 2017; Chakrabarti, 2020), most studies are normative or anecdotal but not theoretically and methodologically organized. The gap in research is the systematic interpretation of the problem of these epic narratives and the use of the proven constructs of EI and indigenous philosophical frameworks to create a coherent leadership construct that can be applicable in theory and HR practice.

Recent scholarship has also focused on refining how emotional intelligence is measured and applied across contexts. Lee et al. (2020) introduced a culturally adapted EI assessment that incorporates moral and social responsibility items beyond traditional trait scales. Omar & Ruiz (2021) propose an integrated EI model that links emotional competencies with ethical decision-making and organisational citizenship behaviour. Fernandes & Zhang (2025) validate an EI intervention program in multinational teams, showing enhanced empathy and ethical leadership outcomes post-training. These studies highlight the need for expanded measurement frameworks and practical tools that reflect diverse cultural and ethical dimensions of emotional intelligence.

2.5 Integrating EI with IKS: Research Gap and Contribution

There are two gaps identified in the existing literature. To begin with, most mainstream research on emotional intelligence (EI) tends to presume that Western conceptualisations of emotional competence apply to cultural and philosophical diversity, with little consideration of the same. Secondly, even though Indian epics are generally recognised as rich in morals and psychology, they are not yet fully used in such research studies that aim at developing emotional intelligence constructs in a systematic way. The paper handles these gaps by

incorporating the EI theory with the Indian Knowledge Systems through qualitative thematic analysis of the selected characters and episodes of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. It creates an indigenous emotional intelligence paradigm that decodes emotional abilities in culturally based philosophical ideas, thus contributing the following:

Emotional Intelligence Theory:

The research broadens the EI theory to its Western epistemological origins by inculcating the emotional skills within the Indian philosophical concepts of dharma (ethical duty), karma (action-consequence), and the self-discipline of a yogi. It redefines emotional intelligence as a psychological capability as well as a moral and relational one, which is conditioned by culture values. This makes it a more pluralistic and context-sensitive concept of emotional intelligence. Table 1 presents a comparative analysis of major characters from the Mahabharata and the Ramayana using the five core components of Emotional Intelligence: self-awareness, regulation, empathy, ethical judgment, and social skill. The purpose of the figure is to connect classical Indian literary characters with a modern psychological framework and to show that concepts similar to emotional intelligence were already embedded in traditional narratives. By using simple visual markers (✓ for moderate and ✓✓ for strong), the figure allows quick and clear comparison of each character's emotional and moral strengths. It highlights Krishna as the most balanced and emotionally intelligent character, while also showing the distinct emotional profiles of Arjuna, Rama, Sita, and Hanuman. Overall, the figure serves an analytical and educational purpose, helping readers understand character traits in a structured, visual, and contemporary way.

Table 1: Emotional Intelligence Dimensions in Epic Characters

Character	Self-awareness	Regulation	Empathy	Ethical judgment	Social skill
Krishna	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Arjuna	✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓
Rama	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓
Sita	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓
Hanuman	✓	✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓

Leadership Studies:

The study provides a culturally sensitive approach to emotionally intelligent leadership, in which the effectiveness of leadership is based on emotional awareness, moral accountability, and solid commitment. The study has introduced leadership as an emotional-ethical practice and not a performance-driven role by analysing epic leaders who make decisions under moral constraint and under emotional complexity. This adds value to leadership theory because it justifies the use of indigenous values as principles of an effective leader.

HRD Practice:

To human resource development, the study gives a framework that can be used to guide culturally responsive leadership development programs. Learning can be applied through the use of epic stories and IKS principles to cultivate empathy, emotional control, moral judgment and social intelligence. This allows the leadership training to be inclusive, cultural, and relevant within the various organizational contexts.

Methodological Contribution:

This research contributes to the methodological practice by considering epic narratives as analytical data, however, not as inspirational or symbolic literature. It shows how indigenous stories can be rigorously applied to theory-building in leadership studies through systematic thematic analysis as aligned to EI dimensions and the IKS concept.

Non-colonised Knowledge of Management:

Lastly, the research also leads to decolonised management studies as it undermines the Western hegemony of epistemology in leadership and EI theory. It makes Indian Knowledge Systems valid sources of theoretical and practical knowledge, which promote knowledge pluralism and the formulation of leadership models with global relevance.

2.6 Research Gap

The literature confirms that emotional intelligence is important for leadership, but most EI theories are culturally narrow and rooted in Western psychology (Mayer et al., 2008; Prasad & Prasad, 2019). At the same

time, Indian epics and Indigenous Knowledge Systems offer deep emotional and ethical insights but are underused in systematic EI research (Chakrabarti, 2020). There is a clear need for a culturally grounded model of emotional intelligence that integrates emotion with moral duty and relational responsibility. This study addresses this gap by integrating emotional intelligence theory with Indian Knowledge Systems through qualitative analysis of epic narratives, leading to the development of an Indigenous Emotional Intelligence framework for leadership and human resource development.

2.7 Conceptual Framework: Integrating Emotional Intelligence with Indian Knowledge Systems



Figure 1: Conceptual integration of Western Emotional Intelligence constructs with Indian Knowledge Systems to develop an Indigenous Emotional Intelligence Framework.

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual foundation of this study by showing how the theory of emotional intelligence and Indian Knowledge Systems are integrated to develop an Indigenous Emotional Intelligence framework. On the left side of the figure are the dominant Western emotional intelligence constructs: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills, which represent the psychological understanding of emotional competence used in leadership and HRD literature. These dimensions describe how individuals perceive, manage, and express emotions in both interpersonal and organisational contexts.

On the right side are core concepts from Indian Knowledge Systems, including *dharma* (ethical responsibility), *karma* (action and consequence), *bhakti* (relational devotion), and yogic self-discipline. These concepts reflect indigenous understandings of emotional life as inseparable from moral duty, relational responsibility, and disciplined self-control. Unlike Western models that focus mainly on individual emotional management, IKS situates emotions within a broader ethical and social order.

At the centre of the figure is the Indigenous Emotional Intelligence Framework, which emerges from the interaction of these two traditions. This framework emphasises culturally grounded emotional competence, ethical and moral awareness, and relational wisdom. It suggests that emotionally intelligent leadership involves not only managing emotions effectively but also aligning emotional behaviour with ethical duty, social responsibility, and cultural values.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

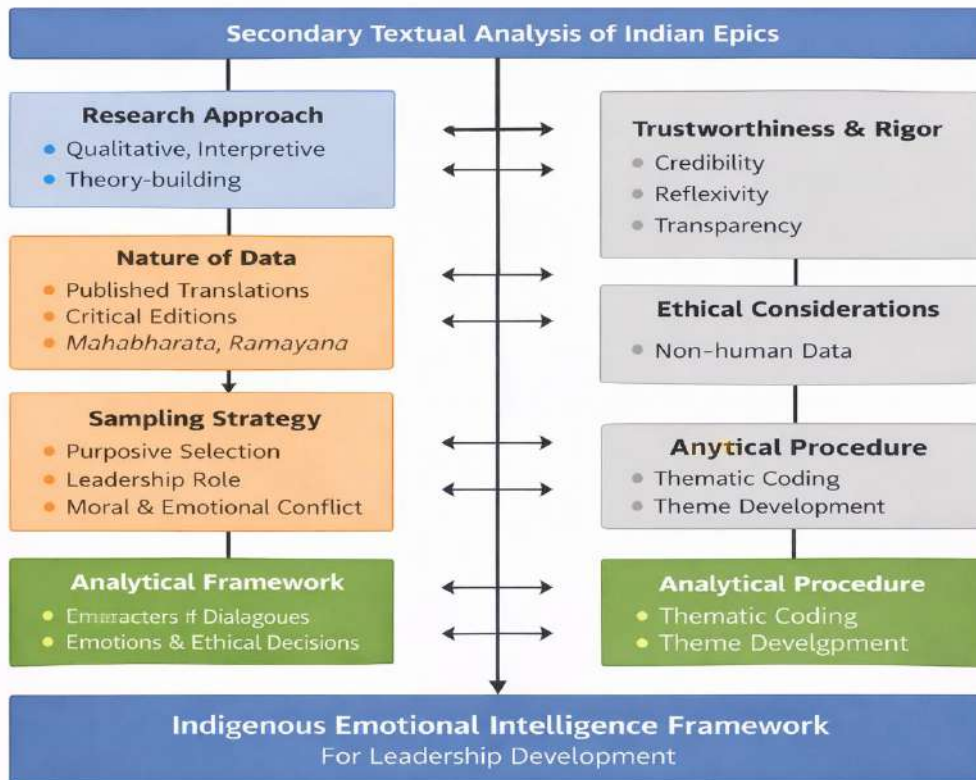


Figure 2: Workflow for Research Methodology

Figure 2 presents the overall research process adopted in this study. It visually explains how the study moves from research design to theoretical output systematically and transparently. At the top, the figure begins with secondary textual analysis of the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, establishing the nature of the data used in the study.

3.1 Research Design and Approach

The research design chosen in this study is qualitative and interpretative research design using secondary data. The aim is to come up with a local emotional intelligence paradigm through decoding of emotional and moral patterns as found in Indian epics. Given the fact that the study concentrates on meanings, values and emotional processes that the narrative texts depict, a qualitative and interpretative approach will be suitable. The research does not focus on testing the variables but seeks to build up theory by means of systematic interpretation of texts of cultural relevance.

3.2 Data Characteristics: Secondary Textual Sources.

The research is solely based on secondary qualitative data which comes as published translations and critical editions of the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. These epics are taken as sources of narrative data which hold psychological, emotional and ethical knowledge transmitted in the form of stories. Secondary information is suitable in this study due to the fact that the objective is not to study modern day behavior rather to derive the model of leadership and emotional intelligence out of a classical text that has traditionally served as a moral and emotional instructional resource.

3.3 Unit of Analysis

Characters, their deeds, conversations, emotional reactions, and moral choices are the main units of analysis. Special attention is paid to those characters who exhibit leadership, influence, or moral authority (Krishna, Arjuna, Rama, Sita, Draupadi, and Hanuman, etc.). The episodes that involve emotional struggle, ethical conflict, sacrifice, duty and relational responsibility are being analysed since such situation discloses emotional awareness, regulation, empathy and ethical reasoning.

3.4 Sampling Strategy

Characters and episodes are selected with the help of a purposive sampling strategy. The selection of the characters is based on the three criteria:

- Position of power or leadership over other people,
- Participation in emotional or moral issues, and
- Cultural and narrative meaning.

The episodes are also chosen when characters are in severe emotional struggle, moral judgment or relationship negotiation like the battlefield crisis of Arjuna, Krishna giving him strategic advice, Rama in his exile and during his reign, Sita in her trials, Draupadi in her disgrace, and Hanuman as his servant. This makes sure that the information is full of emotional and ethical information that pertains to emotional intelligence.

3.5 Analytical Framework

The conceptual lenses of the analysis include two:

Dimensions of emotional intelligence (self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills), and

Concepts of Indian Knowledge Systems (dharma, karma, bhakti, and yoga self-discipline).

These lenses are sensitizing concepts that help interpret without necessarily dictating the outcomes. They enable the emotional and ethical patterns to manifest themselves out of the text and be still theoretically based.

3.6 Analytical Procedure

Thematic analysis is also used as the major approach to analysis. The process is divided into four steps. To become familiar with emotional and ethical patterns, first, the selected readings are repeated. Second, the open coding is performed through the identification of emotional, moral struggle, relationship behaviour and leadership action expressions. Third, the other codes are classified according to the concepts of EI dimensions and IKS. Fourth, more general themes that include emotional restraint, moral courage, relational wisdom and ethical leadership are established. Lastly, the themes are combined to form an Indigenous Emotional Intelligence model on leadership.

3.7 Trustworthiness and Rigour

Several readings and constant comparisons of interpretations are done to make sure that it has credibility. To ensure transparency, the decisions concerning coding are recorded. The process of reflexivity is upheld by critically evaluating the effect of the cultural context of the researcher and his/her theoretical assumptions on the interpretation. Reliability is also created by the explicit recording of the steps used in the analysis to ensure that the process can be repeated. The study is interpretive but has systematic procedures that guarantee analytical rigour.

3.8 Sample Coding and Theme Development

To enhance methodological transparency and meet high-impact journal standards, this study provides sample coding trails illustrating how epic narratives were systematically transformed into analytical themes. Tables 2 and 3 demonstrate the analytical progression from narrative episode to open code, emotional intelligence dimension, Indian Knowledge System lens, and final theme. These examples show how thematic analysis was operationalised in practice rather than remaining only conceptually described. By presenting this audit trail, the study ensures analytical rigour, transparency, and replicability, allowing readers to clearly trace how interpretations emerged from the data.

Table 2: Sample Coding – Mahabharata

Episode	Text / Action	Open Code	EI Dimension	IKS Lens	Final Theme
Arjuna’s battlefield crisis	Arjuna drops his bow, expresses grief and moral confusion	Moral distress, emotional awareness	Self-awareness	Dharma conflict	Emotional Self-Awareness under Ethical Dilemma
Krishna’s counsel to Arjuna	Krishna adapts his teaching to Arjuna’s emotional state	Strategic empathy	Empathy	Karma–Dharma integration	Empathy as Moral Guidance

Table 3: Sample Coding – Ramayana

Episode	Text / Action	Open Code	EI Dimension	IKS Lens	Final Theme
Rama accepts exile	Calm acceptance despite injustice	Emotional discipline	Regulation	Dharma	Regulation through Ethical Duty
Sita in captivity	Endures suffering with moral strength	Emotional resilience	Regulation, Empathy	Bhakti, Dharma	Compassionate Endurance
Hanuman serving Rama	Selfless service to Rama and Sita	Devotional action	Social skill, Empathy	Bhakti	Relational Intelligence through Devotion

3.9 Ethical Considerations

The research uses classical readings that can be found publicly and does not require the involvement of human participants. Thus, no direct ethical risk comes into play. Nevertheless, there is cultural and philosophical discretion in the interpretation of religious stories. The interpretations are provided in a respectful way, which does not involve theological judgment but dwells on emotional, ethical, and leadership-related meanings of significance to organisational and HRD studies.

This approach offers a stringent basis on which secondary qualitative information on Indian epics is employed to come up with a native emotional intelligence model of leadership and human resource development.

4. FINDINGS

The following section shows the key themes that have been identified as a result of the thematic analysis of the picked episodes and characters of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. The results demonstrate the use of emotional intelligence through the emotion awareness, regulation, empathy, ethical judgment and relational competence and the approach of embedding the dimensions of emotional intelligence within the Indian Knowledge Systems.

4.1 Epic Leadership Emotional Self-awareness (ESA).

One of the main themes in all the epics is a strong emotional self-awareness by the main characters. The crisis of Arjuna on the battlefield shows that a person is incredibly aware of internal conflict, fear, grief, and confusion with morality. Arjuna does not suppress his feelings; instead, he openly admits his emotional breakdown, thus, it becomes the beginning of transformation. On the same note, Rama is always conscious of his emotional condition when confronted with exile, separation and loss. He is aware of his sorrow and his attachment, though he deliberately puts personal feeling behind the ethical obligation. Krishna, on the contrary, demonstrates reflective consciousness not only towards his feelings but also the feelings of other people, especially Arjuna, and modifies his teachings accordingly. These stories demonstrate that emotional intelligence is initiated by becoming aware of emotional states instead of repressing them.

4.2 Emotional Control and Regulation.

Emotional control becomes one of the main peculiarities of leadership in the epics. Rama is an example of controlled emotional restraint as he takes exile with himself without anger or revolt though the process was not fair. His reply shows yogic self-control - restraint of impulse and emotion on ethical grounds. The fact that Sita managed to survive in captivity is an expression of emotional strength, and not an emotional repression; she is the one who suffers but, at the same time, has inner stability and moral orientation. Arjuna does not have a proper regulation of his emotions initially as he is immersed in his fears and attachment, but over time slowly learns to control his emotions through reflection and Krishna. Those instances reflect emotional intelligence as the ability to control the emotion without refusing to be emotional.

4.3 Empathy and Relational Intelligence

Empathy is not only described as having an emotional sensitivity but a relational responsibility. The advice that Krishna gives to Arjuna is strategic empathy; he knows how Arjuna feels, how confused and fearful he is, and how his moral pain is, and tailors his message to these needs. He does not ignore the feelings of Arjuna and lets him stay in the state of emotional paralysis. Hanuman is described as empathetic by use of devotion, whereby he serves Rama and Sita selflessly. His emotional intelligence is manifested in loyalty, compassion, and willingness to selflessly do something on behalf of others. It is the case that Draupadi displays relational awareness of humiliating and unjust situations, in which she appeals to the moral conscience of all and not just her own feelings. These are cases that involve empathy as an active moral participation, but not an emotional sympathy.

4.4 Moral Decision-making and Dharma-directed Leadership.

Emotional intelligence cannot be separated from the epics without ethical reasoning. It is not the personal feeling upon which the matters are decided, but rather dharma-ethical responsibility. Rama, on several occasions, prefers duty to desire even though this entails personal pain. The manner in which Arjuna overcomes his emotional crisis is brought about not by emotional comfort but by reorienting his emotions by moral responsibility. Krishna connects feeling, doing and result using the logic of karma, whereby an emotionally intelligent action should take into consideration the effects of that action in the long run in terms of ethical outcomes. These stories indicate that emotional intelligence in Indian epics cannot be separated from moral consciousness.

4.5 Indigenous Emotional Intelligence Dimensions.

Based on thematic analysis, there are five native dimensions of emotional intelligence, which are emotional awareness, emotional regulation, relational empathy, ethical judgment, and disciplined action. These dimensions are consistent with current EI constructs but are well grounded in IKS principles of dharma, karma, bhakti, and yogic self-control. The distribution of these dimensions among the main characters is shown in Table 2 as emotional strengths vary but complement each other. The combination of these dimensions creates an Indigenous Emotional Intelligence model where emotional competence is not only described by interpersonal effectiveness but also by moral accountability and cultural sense.

4.6 Operational Meaning of Indigenous Emotional Intelligence Dimensions

Indigenous Emotional Intelligence is operationalised through five interrelated dimensions. Emotional awareness refers to a leader's ability to recognise and reflect on personal emotions, especially during situations of moral or relational conflict. Emotional regulation is the capacity to manage emotional reactions through inner discipline and ethical reflection rather than impulse. Relational empathy involves understanding the emotions of others and responding with responsibility, care, and social sensitivity. Ethical judgment refers to the ability to make decisions guided by moral duty and social responsibility instead of personal benefit. Disciplined action is the ability to translate emotional understanding and ethical awareness into responsible, purposeful action in real leadership situations



Figure 3: Thematic dimensions of Indigenous Emotional Intelligence derived from epic analysis

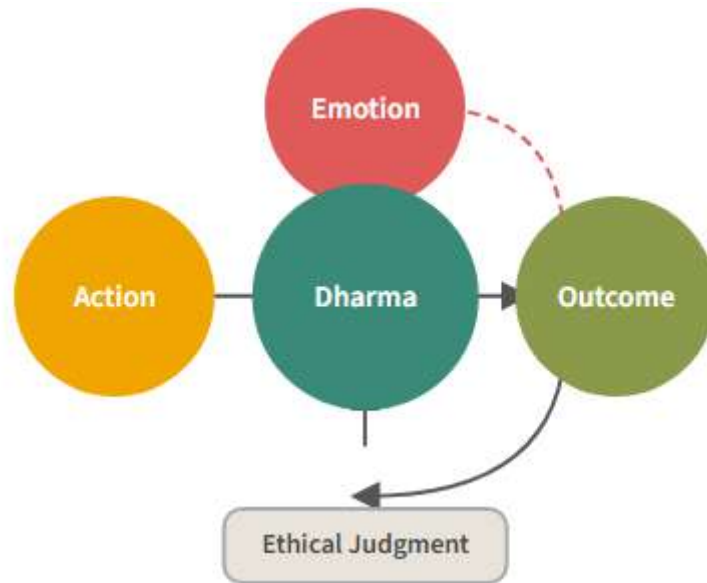


Figure 4: Emotional decision-making through dharma and karma.



Figure 5: Forms of empathy in epic leadership.

The combination of these characters creates a holistic idea of how Indigenous Emotional Intelligence works, relying on characters and values that are present in Indian myths like the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. This framework puts emotional intelligence not only as a psychological ability, but as a moral, relational, and cultural system.

Figure 3 describes the inner framework of Indigenous Emotional Intelligence. It reveals that emotional self-awareness, emotional control and ethical judgment are not discrete skills but are in a process. An individual should know his or her emotions, manage them and lastly analyse his or her actions through moral judgment. The three of them combined create a culturally oriented concept of emotional intelligence, which is influenced by dharma and moral accountability.

This structure is applied in Figure 4 to such epic characters as Krishna, Rama, Arjuna, Sita, and Hanuman. It uses a visual profile in comparing the emotional awareness, discipline, ethical judgment, and action of each of the characters. This indicates that emotional intelligence is not universal, as all the characters have a different emotional style. Krishna is seen as the most balanced prototype, Rama as a person who was aligned to his duty, Arjuna as an emotional and moral character in conflict, Sita as an emotional and socially resilient woman, and Hanuman as a devoted, sentient, and social powerhouse.

Figure 5 emphasises the way decisions are made based on emotions. It demonstrates that feelings control action and actions cause consequences, but this is controlled by dharma and moral compass. This model does not suppress emotions but instead leads them through the morality reasoning process. This is a manifestation of the Indian philosophical concept that right action is not merely founded on feeling or logic, but it is founded on karma and dharma.

Figure 6 compares Western Emotional Intelligence with the Indigenous Emotional Intelligence. Western EI is demonstrated to be individualistic, performance-based, and skills-based. Indigenous EI, on the other hand, is moral-relational, duty-based, and character-based. This is where the difference lies because Western EI is more about personal achievement and efficacy, whereas Indigenous EI is more about social responsibility, interpersonal agreement, and inner being.

The combination of these figures describes that Indigenous Emotional Intelligence is a comprehensive system. It is a mixture of emotion, morals, activity and social justice. This model conceptualises emotional intelligence not as being emotionally intelligent, but as being morally upright, socially responsible, and dharma adhering. This is what has rendered emotional intelligence not just a personal skill, but a cultural and ethical lifestyle.

4.6 Summary of Findings

According to the findings, the Indian epics have a holistic picture of emotional intelligence where emotional awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, and ethical judgment work as a unity. Leadership in these stories is not impassive, but it must be emotionally disciplined based on moral values and responsibility to others. Emotional intelligence is therefore presented as an inbuilt ability in culture that incorporates the concept of emotion, ethics and action. This forms the basis of the creation of an indigenous emotional intelligence framework applicable in the field of leadership and human resource development.

5. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

General Objective

To develop an indigenous emotional intelligence framework for leadership by integrating Emotional Intelligence theory with Indian Knowledge Systems through the analysis of Indian epics.

Specific Objectives

1. To identify emotional intelligence dimensions reflected in selected characters from the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*.
2. To analyse how emotional awareness, regulation, empathy, and ethical judgment are represented through epic narratives.
3. To examine the relationship between emotional competence and ethical responsibility (*dharma*) in epic leadership.
4. To develop an Indigenous Emotional Intelligence model grounded in Indian Knowledge Systems.
5. To explore the relevance of the indigenous EI framework for leadership development and HRD practices.

6. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

H1: Leadership characters in Indian epics demonstrate core dimensions of emotional intelligence, including self-awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, and social competence.

H2: Emotional intelligence in Indian epics is significantly shaped by ethical responsibility (*dharma*) and moral consciousness.

H3: Indigenous Emotional Intelligence differs conceptually from dominant Western EI models by integrating emotional competence with moral duty and relational responsibility.

H4: Leaders who display higher emotional awareness and regulation in epic narratives also demonstrate stronger ethical judgment.

H5: An indigenous emotional intelligence framework derived from Indian Knowledge Systems can provide a culturally responsive model for leadership development.

7. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study align with recent research showing that emotional intelligence is culturally shaped and morally grounded in non-Western societies. While recent studies emphasise cultural sensitivity in leadership models, this study extends that work by providing a structured Indigenous Emotional Intelligence framework rooted in Indian Knowledge Systems. This section synthesises the findings and interprets them in relation to emotional intelligence theory, leadership studies, and Indian Knowledge Systems, while highlighting the broader theoretical and practical significance of the study.

7.1 Emotional Intelligence as a Culturally Situated Construct

The results are quite clear and point to the fact that emotional intelligence cannot be perceived as a culturally neutral or universally homogeneous phenomenon. Although the models of EI in the West are mostly based on cognitive and behavioural psychology, the epic-based model evidences that emotional competence in the context of the Indian Knowledge System is closely interwoven with moral, social, and spiritual factors. It does not regard emotional awareness, regulation and empathy as value-free skills, but as abilities that acquire their own meaning only when they are pursued in accordance with dharma (ethical duty) and karma (action-consequence). This leads to the argument that emotional intelligence has to be culturally framed and construed in the traditions of philosophical action that can define ethical action. In this way, the study will take the EI theory beyond the psychological functionality to the sphere of moral and cultural accountability.

7.2 Leadership as Moral–Emotional Practice

The results indicate that Indian epics' leadership is not only a strategic or performance-oriented leadership model. Rama and Krishna are leaders who make morally sound choices that are informed by emotions. They do not dissociate emotion with responsibility; on the contrary, they combine emotional knowledge and moral obligation. Compassion, restraint, sacrifice, and relational accountability are their leadership principles. This is a challenge to instrumental leadership models that are primarily concerned with efficiency and results. Rather, leadership is moralised as an emotive practice in which power is justified through ethical action and emotional accountability. Such interpretation reinforces ethical and value-based theories of leadership as they are based on indigenous philosophy.

7.3 Emotional Control as Self-Mastery.

The epic narratives bring out the idea that emotional control is not emotional repression or emotional withdrawal. Rama and Sita are some of the characters who face grief and loss, and injustice, but they do not have their emotional drives to override their moral sense. The discipline of engagement with emotion, rather than emotion denial, is depicted by regulation. This redefines emotional intelligence as self-mastery as opposed to emotional control, to be efficient. The epic model provides that emotionally intelligent leadership needs inner discipline mediated by values, which is contrary to the contemporary managerial styles that frequently focus on emotional management as a means of productivity.

7.4 Ethical Responsibility Empathy.

It has found that there are various types of empathy, such as strategic (Krishna), devotional (Hanuman), moral (Rama) and suffering-based (Sita). These differences demonstrate that empathy is not a one-dimensional phenomenon but a practice that takes place in relationships and ethics. Not only are leaders supposed to comprehend the feelings of others, but they are supposed to do something about this knowledge. Empathy is thus a moral responsibility and not necessarily a social or psychological ability. This expands mainstream EI theory by introducing morality to the phenomenon of empathy.

7.5 Indigenous Emotional Intelligence as the Hologram.

The Indigenous Emotional Intelligence model incorporates emotion, ethics, action and consequence. Emotional awareness brings about reflection, reflection is governed by dharma, and action gives rise to karma. This cyclical model is contrasted with the Western models of EI that tend to distinguish between emotion and morality as two different directions. Indigenous model comes out with emotional intelligence as being holistic, relational and ethically based. It demonstrates that emotional competence cannot be detached from character and moral responsibility.

7.6 Conclusions about Leadership Theory.

These results indicate that the theory of leadership should shift its focus from a performance-based model to one based on ethical and cultural aspects of emotional life. The epic model of leadership is not dominance and control; rather involves service, responsibility and moral courage. It reinforces the theories of leadership that

focus on servant leadership, ethical leadership and authentic leadership, but introduces indigenous philosophical grounding that makes the above concepts culturally diverse and globally applicable.

7.7 Addition to Decolonised Knowledge of Management.

This research will surpass the supremacy of Western epistemologies in the studies of leadership and EI by employing Indian epics as sources of analysis and not symbols. It shows that indigenous traditions can produce systematic, transferable and theoretically meaningful leadership models. This is in keeping with the decolonised management scholarship that triggers plural systems of knowledge and epistemic diversity.

7.8 Implication to HRD and Leadership Development.

The Indigenous Emotional Intelligence framework has the ability to guide culturally responsive leadership development programs. Emotional awareness, ethical reasoning, and relational responsibility can be built through the use of epic narratives, reflection, and dialogue as a part of training. This will render leadership learning more purposeful in culturally varied and non-Western situations, as well as apply to the global organisations.

7.9 Theoretical Synthesis

Generally, it can be concluded that emotional intelligence, when interpreted in the light of Indian Knowledge systems, can be seen as a moral-emotional ability that informs leadership behaviour. Leadership is depicted to be emotionally aware, ethically based and socially responsible. This supports the main argument of the paper that indigenous epistemologies can make significant contributions to the emotional intelligence theory, leadership research, and the development of human resources.

8. IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Theoretical Implications

This paper adds to the emotional intelligence theory in terms of broadening their cultural and epistemological frames. It demonstrates that EI is not a culturally neutral phenomenon, instead, emotional competence is conditioned by philosophical, ethical, and social traditions. The incorporation of emotional intelligence as a moral-emotional ability and not a mere psychological skill through incorporation of EI and Indian Knowledge Systems into the study reformulates the perception of emotional intelligence. This suggests that future EI studies should not rely on Western-based models but instead base them on culturally based models. It further creates room to make comparative analysis of the indigenous and dominant models of EI which adds depth to global theory of leadership.

8.2 Implications for Leadership Practice

Applying this to leadership practice, the results indicate that successful leadership should not be influenced or performed by just using emotional skills. Leaders should be able to build emotional consciousness that is informed by moral responsibility and interpersonal accountability. The native EI model demonstrates that the emotional, reflective, ethical responsibility and social responsibility should be incorporated in leadership decisions. In practice, it implies that leaders ought to receive training on how their emotional reactions impact outcomes as well as moral legitimacy and trust. Value-driven emotional responsibility can be enforced in leadership practice instead of performance-driven emotional management.

8.3 Recommendations to Human Resource Development.

In the case of HRD, the research gives a culturally sensitive model of leadership development. Epic narratives, storytelling, reflective conversation and analysis of ethical cases can be introduced into the training programs to build emotional awareness, empathy, self-regulation, and moral judgment. HR practitioners should not stick to Western case studies but instead employ indigenous narratives in a way that appeals to the cultural background of the learners. The strategy could enhance participation, enhance moral awareness, and create emotionally intelligent leaders sensitive to cultural and moral aspects of organizational reality.

8.4 Management Education Implication.

Indigenous knowledge can be utilised in management and leadership courses. An additional way of including the Indian epics and IKS ideas in leadership classes is assisting the students in realising that leadership is a moral-emotional process and not just a technical one. This is backed by decolonised and pluralistic models of education that do not assume only one knowledge tradition as the legitimate source of theory. This kind of practice equips future leaders to become ethical and emotionally intelligent in culturally diverse settings.

8.5 Policy and Organisation Implications.

The indigenous EI can be applied by organisations and policymakers who are dealing with the training of leadership to formulate development policies that are sensitive to culture. Some core competencies in the

leadership competency framework can be emotional discipline, ethical responsibility and relational sensitivity. This has the potential to reinforce organisational cultures that embrace integrity, empathy and social responsibility in addition to performance.

9. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study is based only on secondary textual analysis of the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. No primary data from contemporary leaders or organisations has been used. Therefore, the Indigenous Emotional Intelligence framework has not yet been empirically tested in real organisational settings. Interpretations may also vary because different translations and versions of the epics exist. As the analysis is qualitative and interpretive, the researcher's perspective may influence theme development. These limitations suggest that the findings should be seen as theory-building rather than final conclusions.

10. DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future studies can test the Indigenous Emotional Intelligence framework in real organisational contexts using surveys, interviews, and experiments. Researchers can develop a measurement scale based on the five indigenous EI dimensions and validate it statistically. Comparative studies between Western EI models and Indigenous EI models can also be conducted across different cultures. Further research may also include other Indian texts, such as the Upanishads and Puranas, to expand the indigenous leadership framework.

11. RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION

This study makes three major contributions. First, it extends emotional intelligence theory by integrating moral duty, relational responsibility, and cultural values through Indian Knowledge Systems, moving EI beyond a purely psychological skill. Second, it contributes to leadership studies by presenting leadership as a moral-emotional practice rather than only a performance-driven role. Third, it supports decolonised management scholarship by positioning Indian epics as valid sources of theoretical knowledge, not merely cultural or religious texts. Together, these contributions offer a culturally grounded and globally relevant model of emotionally intelligent leadership.

12. CONCLUSION

- The Indian epics' emotional intelligence is both psychological and moral-emotional ability, based on dharma, karma, bhakti, and self-control.
- Leadership in the Mahabharata and Ramayana is also emotionally sensitive, ethical, and socially accountable instead of being performance-based.
- The Indigenous Emotional Intelligence framework takes the EI theory further than the Western epistemological frameworks and brings up culturally-based emotional competence.
- Narrative conflict and duty situations are examples of epic characters who exhibit major EI dimensions of self-awareness, regulation, empathy, and ethical judgment.
- The paper establishes Indian Knowledge Systems as valid sources of leadership and emotional intelligence theory.
- The framework offers culturally sensitive leadership development and HRD courses guidelines.
- Effective pedagogical tools to be used in achieving emotional and ethical leadership training can be applied in the form of epic narratives.
- The study embraces decolonised and pluralistic management education.
- The study is conceptual but provides a firm foundation for further empirical studies in organisational contexts.
- Blending ancient wisdom with contemporary leadership requirements produces leaders who are emotionally intelligent, ethical and culturally intelligent.

This study demonstrates that emotional intelligence, when viewed through Indian Knowledge Systems, becomes a moral emotional capability grounded in duty, responsibility, and relational care. Leadership in the epics is not based on power or performance alone but on emotional awareness guided by ethical commitment. The Indigenous Emotional Intelligence framework offers a culturally rooted yet globally meaningful model of leadership. By blending ancient wisdom with contemporary leadership needs, this research opens new paths for theory, practice, and education in emotionally and ethically grounded leadership.

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