

International and Cultural Psychology

*Series Editor:* Anthony J. Marsella, Ph.D.

Girishwar Misra

Indiwar Misra *Editors*

# Emotions in Cultural Context

 Springer

# **International and Cultural Psychology**

**Series Editor**

Anthony J. Marsella, Alpharetta, GA, USA

Explores problems and challenges to mental health, psychosocial wellbeing, human growth and development, and human welfare that are emerging from our contemporary global context. It advances in psychological knowledge regarding the nature and consequences of the many social, cultural, economic, political, and environmental events and forces that affect individuals and communities throughout the world. The series covers areas like therapy, assessment, organizational psychology, community psychology, gender, child development, and specific disorders. In addition, it addresses major global challenges such as poverty, peace, urbanization, modernization, refugees, and migration. The series acknowledges the multidisciplinary, multisectoral, and multicultural nature of the global context of our lives, and publishes books that reflect this reality.

Girishwar Misra • Indiar Misra  
Editors

# Emotions in Cultural Context

 Springer

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*“Emotions in Cultural Context leans on Indian perspectives and at the same time presents glimpses from other cultures such as the United States and East Asia. A range of Indian concepts are addressed, such as bhakti, rasa, bhava, yoga, natya shastra to acquaint the reader with the rich Indic cultural conceptions and their value in understanding human emotions. Overall, the volume presents an excellent illustration of cultural embodiment of emotions at the same time interweaving relevant contextual factors that have a bearing on the variable expression and regulation of emotions and emotional experience. The book is not only a valuable contribution to the dynamic field of human emotions, but equally to strengthening Indian cultural understanding of human development. I congratulate the editors and the authors for creating this seminal work on culture and emotions.”*

– Shagufa Kapadia, Professor of Human Development & Family Studies, Fellow of the National Academy of Psychology (NAOP), The M.S. University of Baroda, Vadodara, India

*“‘Emotion in Cultural Context’ is a welcome addition to the ongoing global efforts to contextualize psychological understanding. It adds to the internationalization of Indian perspectives on emotions in all its dimensions, in rasa (essence) and bhava (existence). Further, I am in complete agreement with the editors’ modest claim: ‘In sum, this volume undertakes the momentous task of addressing some of the gaps in the emerging field of cultural psychology. Each chapter focuses on a unique aspect of emotions in the cultural context, and in doing so, addresses some very pertinent questions in research on emotions. The position of this volume is thus unique, as it advances this field while simultaneously creating opportunities and leaving space for future research’.”*

– Salagame. K. Kiran Kumar, Professor of Psychology (Retd.), University of Mysore, India

– Author, *The Psychology of Meditation: A Contextual Approach*

*“If you think that you don’t want to read again another book on how language and facial expressions vary across cultures, you will be surprised. This is not only a rich volume in terms of breadth and depth of topics presented by an impressive collection of scholars from across the globe; it also probes some unique emotional perspectives of Eastern, Indian and global cultures. Examples are discourses on ‘Bhava’ and ‘Rasa’, the emotion of ‘Lajja’, the distinctive Buddhist construct of ‘Bodhichitta’. It ranges from topics like emotional empowerment in*

*high school to transformation of self and cosmic feelings. His book will leave you thinking afresh about psychology and life.”*

– Jayanti Basu, Professor, Department of Applied Psychology, Calcutta University, Kolkata, India

*“This book is a treasure trove for scholars and researchers interested in diving deep into theoretical and empirical work on emotions in the context of culture. With its primary focus on the cultural lens that reflects on perceptions, experience, expression, regulation, and transformation of emotions in India and other Asian countries, I see this book as a precious resource for years to come. The comprehensive coverage of topics on the core theme of emotions from varied perspectives, an emphasis on cultural analysis, and pointers for collective reflection, further research, and practice are likely to provide a rich reading experience. Highly recommended!”*

– Seema Mehrotra, Professor, Department of Clinical Psychology, National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences, Bangalore, India

*The volume unveils the finer nuances of cultures on determinants, experiences, and expressions of emotions with novel observations. For example, low-arousal emotions are valued in collectivist societies and high-arousal in individualistic societies; the school context in the US fosters negative emotions of tiredness, boredom, and stress, but the students’ aspirational emotions reveal happiness, inspiration, and empowerment;*



*and traumatic expressions among East Asians manifest in somatic symptoms. Moreover, emotional regulation can transform individuals' reasons, novelty, morality, character, knowledge, and actions for a good life. It is a must-read for expert as well as novice psychologists to gain ground on emotions and conduct research for knowledge construction.*

– Damodar Suar, Ph.D. FNA Psychology,  
Chair, Social Science Research, KIIT  
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Ex-HAG Professor & HOD, Department of  
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*Dedicated to  
Professor Anthony J. Marsella,  
a pioneer in the field of indigenous  
psychology for inspiration and  
continuous support*

# Foreword

## A New Era ...

What? Another volume or publication on Culture and Emotion? Clearly, this should not be a surprise! Both topics have been important in scholarly and clinical applied research.

“Culture and Emotion” has been one of the most popular topics of discussion and inquiry in the past decade across cultural studies in psychology, anthropology, philosophy, and the social sciences. The topic of “Culture and Emotion” offers rich insights into our human understanding the very nature of human nature (Ontology). Variations across cultures implicate the fundamental issue of human nature, as the sources, determinants, and expression of emotion define humanity’s uniqueness.

Among humans, emotion is a critical dimension of experience, varying in duration, frequency, and intensity; emotion can be a source of happiness and pleasure, or it can be, in its extremes, a bewildering disorder. Emotion, in its extremes (e.g., bipolar disorder, depression, rage reactions), has been present across human history, suggesting a universality in human nature.

Support for the view universality of “emotion” resides in human brain structure, with determinants present, however, in the human midbrain (e.g., tri-level model of brain including brain stem, midbrain, and frontal brain). However, variations across cultures, demonstrated in literature, philosophy, and social science research, cannot be dismissed.

Research on emotion facial displays by Paul Ekman, an American (USA) social psychologist, concluded ‘emotions’ have similar facial displays and similar recognition across the world. He contends an angry and growling face is acknowledged by most to be a source of danger. This finding, however, does not consider the fact that a quiet, unexpressive facial display can also be an expression of anger. The reality is that emotions have many different ways of displaying and experiencing as a result of cultural socialization influences.

There are considerable cultural linguistic variations in the perceptions of emotion. Consider the reality that objective “denotative” and “semantic” meanings of events, forces, and objects are functions of unique cultural variations in “emotion.”

A simple wooden “Chair” has different implications and associations in a jungle village where there is only one “Chair,” and that chair is reserved for the village chief. A chair is not a chair! Viewing (perceiving) a chair elicits a range of sensory experiences which interacts with emotions, shaped by cultural contexts and traditions.

## **A New Era, A New Age ...**

Humanity is at the edge of a new era; an era characterized by revolutionary technologies that alter century-old concepts of human ontology. Within the span of a decade, technological advances (e.g., AI, Chat GPT, I Phones, 3D Construction, Robotics) have created a new World for humanity, providing billions of people with access to the most recent advances in knowledge and information. Sacrosanct traditions about human nature, deeply rooted in reflexive emotional traditions, are being challenged.

Consider the fact that a tribal person in a distant peasant village with a modest laptop computer can today access the Library of Congress, gleaning shocking information. This information challenges timeless views of traditional reality, once rooted in an isolation from others in contemporary times.

Residents from different nations around the world have suddenly found themselves members of a global community, replete with shared implications of knowledge about human survival amid global poverty, starvation, and endless wars.

At the heart of this new Global Age or Era looms a possibility distant cosmic events and forces contained the seeds of human nature, via emotion. A fascinating thought is that amidst the endless acts of cosmic creation, one can find human emotion as parallel content and process, a morphical expression of cosmic actions. Even as humanity is but a dot in the infinite nature of the cosmos does not mean that implicit Cosmos purposes for survival can be linked to the experience of ‘emotion’ across all life forms for the survival and perpetuation of life species.

Emotions serve arousal functions, mobilizing the species to be alert (conscious) of imposing inner and outer sources of concern, including danger and pleasure. Emotions evoke and shape personal “meaning.” Within this context, emotions are sources of existential meaning and purpose. Emotions define identity.

Variation and diversity among individuals, cultures, and nations now struggle with uniform conformity views, dismissing relevant cultural assumptions, beliefs, emotions, and physiology codified in societal institutions preserving realistic perspectives on human nature.

More than a 50 years ago, Girishwar Misra (1996), an Asian-Indian psychologist and the present editor of this volume, wrote of the risks of accepting Western psychology as universal. Misra, within the context of India’s vast historical store of diverse philosophies and religions, recognized that Western psychological

dominance was largely a socio-political phenomenon, rather than a valid accounting of the varied views of human behavior that existed across the world.

In a now ‘classic’ paper, Misra, with eloquence, force, and credibility, stated:

The current Western thinking of the science of psychology in its prototypical form, despite being local and indigenous, assumes a global relevance and is treated as a universal mode of generating knowledge. Its dominant voice subscribes to a decontextualized vision with an extraordinary emphasis on individualism, mechanism, and objectivity. This peculiarly Western mode of thinking is fabricated, projected, and institutionalized through representation technologies and scientific rituals and transported on a large scale to the non-Western societies under political and economic domination.

As a result, Western psychology tends to maintain an independent stance at cost of ignoring other substantive possibilities from disparate cultural traditions. Mapping reality through Western constructs has offered a pseudo-understanding of the people of alien cultures and has had debilitating effects in terms of misconstruing the special realities of other people and exoticizing or disregarding psychologies that are non-Western. Consequently, when people from other cultures are exposed to Western psychology, they find their identities placed in question and their conceptual repertoires rendered obsolete. (Misra, 1996, pp. 497–498)

Yes! Yes! Another volume and another publication on “Culture and Emotion” is warranted! Hopefully another publication will be followed by numerous others as the important topic of the mosaic of “Emotion” pursues further understanding.

The current volume, with its multiple chapters by talented authors, is a rich and fruitful journey into understanding “Culture and Emotion” relationships. It is welcome! It joins a long history and tradition of “Culture and Emotion” publications, and helps advance understanding of topic, this concept, this biopsychological and cultural reality. It can be asked, is any other topic more central to human identity?

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## Reference

Misra, G. Section in Gergen, K., Gulerce, A., Lock, A., & Misra, G. (1996). Psychological sciences in cultural context. *American Psychologist*, 51, 496–503.

# Preface

Being ubiquitous, emotions are often deployed to understand and explain psychological processes under ordinary as well as complex circumstances by common people as well as the community of psychologists. The present volume showcases our understanding of emotions in a cultural context. Indeed, its study and exploration are receiving increasing attention in research, and publications in this field are surpassing other areas. In today's world, emotions claim a central position in psychological research. This is attested to by the rapid rise in the number of studies and theoretical works on human emotions since the mid-1980s. Scholars from disparate fields like psychology, neuroscience, economics, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, and biology have added to research in this area, making it a subject of truly multidisciplinary inquiry. Researchers have addressed the various facets of emotion at different levels (e.g., facial expressions, motor actions, verbal behavior, neural responses, depression, anxiety, and feelings) using an array of methods and perspectives. At the same time, the discipline of psychology is in a state of flux and many theoretical and methodological approaches are struggling to move beyond the homogeneity and hegemony of the Western tradition of knowledge.

The empirical studies and theories of emotion in mainstream psychology are dominated by Euro-American cultural context. Humans are a cultural species and their experiences and activities are culturally grounded. In fact, all psychological phenomena and processes, whether similar or different across cultures, remain inescapably entangled in cultural meanings. However, defining and framing to reclaim the discipline's indigenous roots has proved to be a difficult task. We need to reposition in order to document how cultural analysis illuminates the psychology of the people.

This volume was planned to address three objectives: (1) to provide a scholarly review of important areas of inquiry in the cultural psychology of emotions, (2) to elaborate culture-specific analyses, and (3) to draw specific suggestions for practice that derive from the scholarly literature. We also asked authors to suggest questions for future investigation and to derive practical implications.

This volume also addresses research areas from other parts of the world that draw evidence from across different regions and traditions. There is a relative lack

of books that introduce research from a culturally informed perspective; this was one of the major motivations for this volume. In recent years, there have been advances in investigations in the area of emotions from diverse angles. However, there is a need for a volume that covers these advancements while delving into the cultural context of emotion research.

In the process of preparing this volume, we have benefitted from a stimulating working environment at the Department of Psychology, University of Delhi. The volume started as a project on emotions supported by a career award to one of the editors (GM) from the University Grants Commission, New Delhi, and a National Fellowship from the Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi. The work of doctoral students at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS), Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee, when the other editor (IM) was a faculty. The presentations by one of the editors (GM) at the meetings of the International Congress of Psychology held in Beijing (2008), at Berlin (2012), and at the New School of Social Research, New York, offered opportunities to share some thoughts in this area.

The desire to bring together scholars from around the world to discuss the intersection between research in emotion and culture created the main impetus for this volume. A diverse group of scholars volunteered to join us in this endeavor. We have worked to preserve each author's voice without asking everyone to come from the same set of assumptions or research traditions. We thank our authors for trying so hard to address the issues and revise the chapters. We thank our families for their patience and support.

Preparing the volume was a significant challenge and we are grateful to many colleagues who provided support and advice along the way. The inspiration to prepare this volume came from Professor Anthony J. Marsella. His pioneering work has provided a much-needed cross-cultural lens to many subfields of psychology, and we are grateful for his contribution not just to this volume but to psychology at large. As a series editor of Springer, he provided guidance and support and consented to write a foreword to the volume. Our colleagues including Aruna Broota, Matthijs Cornellison, Late A.K. Dalal, Late Kirit Joshi, Shilpa Ashok Pandit, Anand C. Paranjpe, Anand Prakash, Kumar Ravi Priya, Late K. Ramkrishna Rao, Purnima Singh, Damodar Suar, Suneet Varma, and Pallavi Rannathan have helped in several ways. We are very grateful to them.

Indeed, emotion research is a thriving scientific endeavor involving researchers across a range of different areas. There is a gradual acceptance that it is necessary to incorporate research from across different disciplines and levels of analysis to develop a comprehensive understanding of human emotions and subjective feelings. We hope that this book can provide an introduction to the exciting field and allow readers to acquaint themselves with the developments in the field.

Delhi, India  
New Delhi, India

Girishwar Misra  
Indiwar Misra

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