

Theoretical Approaches to Happiness

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ABSTRACT:

Happiness is the most significant factor to influence the satisfaction of individuals' all walks of life in a given phenomenon. Much more researches need to be conducted in the field of sociology of happiness to analyze the determinants and implications of happiness for contemporary modern society. However, sociology falls short of investigating the intricate realities of happiness as individual happiness is directly concerned with the mind or psychological phenomenon in the first place. Based on the available literature, three approaches such as the Needs approach with emphasis on individual needs and their fulfilment; the Standard approach focusing on living standards and the Cultural approach stressing the culture of the people, were formulated by the experts. The World Happiness Index, published by the United Nations, indicates that India is ranked 139th of 149 countries listed on the basis of happiness even lower among the neighbouring countries for different reasons. It is found that happiness is a psychological concept interpreting with individual minds of people. Happiness is relative and differs from each individual, community and society. Thus, the components of happiness such as needs, standards and culture of individuals and society are variable. Although many attempts have been made, across the globe, to analyze happiness, definite inferences have not been drawn on the subject.

Keywords: Approaches, Happiness, Psychological, Sociology of happiness, Living standards

Date of Submission: 05-06-2021

Date of Acceptance: 19-06-2021

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of Happiness has attracted the attention of economists, sociologists and psychologists, in defining and interpreting different philosophical traditions and theoretical perspectives regarding happiness prevailing in a given society (Greco, et al, 2015).). Haybron (2007) while analyzing the significance of empirical studies on happiness, interpreted the association between happiness, life satisfaction and well being of the individuals. According to him, the terms happiness and wellbeing are used interchangeably in most empirical studies. However, when it comes to the analysis of implications of these two, it is presumed reasonably that the notion of life satisfaction has a greater say in yielding unique results. Thus, life satisfaction suggests more investigations on notions of the good life and pleasure based happiness. As a result, this paper intends to consider happiness and well-being while analyzing the notions of life satisfaction and contentment.

Happiness is a positive emotional state characterized by feelings of the present moment joy, life satisfaction, contentment and fulfilment. It focuses on the subjective well being of an individual's overall personal feelings about his life in the present conditions. Subject well-being consists of two key components such as the balance of emotions and life satisfaction. Thus, happiness is generally linked to experiencing more positive emotions, feelings and moods rather than negative ones. Furthermore, life satisfaction includes our gratifying relationships and work achievements in different areas. Thus happiness depends upon a socially constructed notion of good life and values such as income and fame. Generally, we feel good when the needs of our life are met.

This paper aims to ascertain the measures of individual and collective happiness and validity of these explicate the role of social organizations in understanding the life satisfaction of the individuals and to explore the possibility and importance of studying the happiness of the population in the form of different societies or nations. Coming to individuals happiness, it is always tough to answer such question as; Who is happy? and When and Why do people feel happy?, predictions of happiness ranging from personal and internal to societal and external factors have been reflected. Moreover, happiness and well being are subjective states that are constructed with relatively stable, internal and personal factors such as genetics, personality, material satisfaction and emotion regulation., According to Lyumdomirsky and Layous (2013) activities such as expressing gratitude, seeking one's blessings and thinking positively about an ideal future also predict happiness. Apart from these, societal or external factors such as having close relationships, social status, economic condition, job, experiencing life event like marriage or divorce, neighbourhood environment and income inequality are also associated with one's level of happiness.

The advantages of being happy are: happiness helps people to establish stronger adjusting skills and emotional resources; it is linked to better health along with increased immunity, diet practices, regular physical exercise and longevity; and it enables to increase resilience. Thus, happier persons tend to possess such salient features as joy, excitement, gratitude, pride, optimism and contentment.

II. SOCIOLOGICAL VIEWS ON HAPPINESS

August Comte, the father of sociology, saw positivism as a kind of 'toolkit' in organizing people of society to live a good life. He laid the foundation to further our views on happiness by considering it as a goal to achieve through reasoning, a set of ethics and values. Durkheim, on the other hand, realized that well being was threatened by modernity. He states that quality of life, the mark of happiness, resides in the quality of relationship. According to him, progression in the number of suicide cases indicates average happiness among the societal members. Durkheim also touches upon the management of expectation in dynamic societies in which elusive lifestyle and happiness are always just out of reach. His prescription for better well being and a good society lies not necessarily in religious beliefs and practices but in the maintenance of complex networks between individuals through moral regulation, social cohesion and division of labour.

On the contrary, Marx and Engels were more concerned with economic relationships constituting well being and a good society. According to them, capitalism appears to be a major threat to happiness. The concept of alienation is the essence of the Marxist theory of capitalist societies. Marx writes that an alienated person, far from happiness, feels himself as denied, unhappy and mortified. Thus, he identifies some of the elemental features of being happy like creativity and nourishing activity to keep away from the pleasures of modern living.

Max Weber also made some key contributions to happiness studies by interpreting various approaches to living well, to manage suffering and insecurity. He wrote extensively about people's inner charisma and the ability to learn, grow and create an opportunity to develop their potential for the betterment of individuals and societies. According to him, the growth in rationalisation undermined well being in the field of employment and wider social relations. It is observed that Weber was pessimistic of the prospects of happiness as people became overly specialized without spirit and tried to adapt rationalized modern ways of living. Furthermore, George Simmel, like other founding scholars, often documented the role of pathologies of modern life, complex social networks and interactions in analyzing the quality of life of citizens. The effort of the Frankfurt School theorist like Marcuse (2002) signifies the way that many modern sociologists understand the functions of happiness. According to Marcuse, the rise of the mass media and expansion of consumption of goods were linked to the notions of happiness such as joy, fun and pleasure. On the whole, modern sociologists can take much of these classical viewpoints to develop the sociology of happiness.

Generally, sociologists tend to distinguish between objective wellbeing and subjective wellbeing, however, these two constitute the popular term quality of life as the individual is a social and rational animal fixed in social relations striving for leading a quality life. (Greco, et al, 2015).

Although subject experts have analysed published the literature, still it is found that there is a need for an exhaustive study in the field of sociology of happiness. In this context, the theoretical approaches such as (i) the Needs Approach (ii) the Standard Approach (iii) the Cultural Approach on happiness are discussed. However, each of these approaches is not systematically established and distinctively analyzed but are characterized by various focal points.

Before venturing into the literature analysis, there is a need to address two things. Firstly, these approaches have not covered all the happiness studies. Some of the experts have given inborn tendencies as determinants of happiness. Here, the people had different baseline levels of happiness. Human nature and social conditions need to be prioritized in the field of happiness research for the comprehensive analysis of happiness related factors by the application of an interdisciplinary approach. In the light of the above discussion it could be generalized that aforesaid, three perspectives highlighted have focused heavily on social conditions and the responses of individuals to them. How does an individual respond to global and domestic-related satisfaction? is a fascinating subject matter in the analysis of subjective well-being (SWB), which consists of pleasant and unpleasant emotions. Thus, it is noted that life satisfaction is measured in terms of subjective well-being. Even though few of the subject experts highlighted few differences between happiness and satisfaction in life, still both of these concepts are used as proxy subjective well-being as revealed in many of the studies. Hence, in the present paper, the terms such as happiness, the satisfaction of life and subjective well-being are used interchangeably.

III. HUMAN NEEDS APPROACH

The Needs Approach is based on the postulate that to increase happiness, there requires to satisfy human needs. In this regard, it is necessary to find out the essentials that are needed to be fulfilled to attain happiness and prevailing conditions to satisfy their needs. As all the needs of human beings are not similar and it is not proved that, if the needs of human beings are fulfilled, then they are happy. Even though a few empirical

studies were already been conducted in this respect, however, the results are not correlated. Identical efforts have been made by Hagerty, et.al., (2007) and Diener (1984), to analyse the bases for happiness. The discussion revealed that a combination of human needs and happiness is depending on the culture. It is ambiguous to say that there is a relation between objective conditions and fulfilment of needs. Because it is difficult to enlist the exhaustive needs of human beings to maximise happiness. Of course, fulfilment of living conditions and well being is to be distinguished from happiness. Apart from basic living conditions, there are also other factors on which happiness depends and such factors include health, education, income, security, housing, social contacts, environment and so on. However, there is confusion regarding what factors ought to be considered in measuring the happiness of human beings on the basis of fulfilment of their needs in a given phenomenon.

These days needs approach has been considered as a significant theoretical perspective to study cross-national happiness extensively. Following on the same line Veenhoven(2005) revealed that more than three-fourths (77 percent) of national-level happiness is thought to be influenced by such factors as, economic status, nutrition, equal opportunities, liberty and educational factors. If there are similar conditions across various nations, then there can be invariably a similar level of happiness among human beings living in these nations. World Value Surveys have also revealed that various factors such as level of economic development, democracy and cultural factors play a significant role in deriving happiness. However, to develop and elaborate sociological theory no clear results have been drawn from the studies on needs approach. Thus, the researchers have no choice but to infer that the satisfaction of needs could be found with increased happiness.

IV. RELATIVE STANDARDS APPROACH

This approach is based on the assumption that happiness is influenced by the balance between prevailing conditions and attributional regularities. Setting high standards for themselves without understanding the prevailing conditions would lead the persons to feel less satisfied. According to this approach, to a greater extent, the external factors and circumstances indirectly affect happiness. Hence, depending on the situations and flexible external factors, people can use standards to maximise happiness at their expected levels. This approach is based on psychological theories, which reveal the judgements and minor changes as significant factors for evaluation. Hence, happiness is an outcome of the relative change in conditions of life and reflect some absolute conditions. The relative standards approach has gained importance in sociology and economics. Although the relative standards approach is largely accepted, it has some drawbacks as well. Firstly, there is an argument that all conditions are not appraised relatively. Secondly, it is not sustained when the conditions are compared between different nations. Finally, there is an uncertainty in clarifying which reference standard is considered under what circumstances for comparison. In view of these limitations, it is reviewed that there is a need to identify relevant reference standards for the understanding of specific comparative background factors of happiness.

V. CULTURAL APPROACH

The cultural approach deals with the fact that the happiness of the people tends to be influenced by societal norms, cultural heritage and conventions. This approach contends that striking factors that differentiate happiness between the group are not been found associated with the prevailing standards of living. Thus, the cultural characteristics of a nation will have a bearing on the happiness of its population. This approach helps to understand the culture and remove the prejudices and biases about society. The findings from various studies made on cultural approach have shown that happiness varies based on cultural traditions and norms that may influence pleasant and unpleasant emotional responses. It is found that culture is an independent factor that may increase or decrease the happiness of people. One of the limitations of the cultural approach is that happiness influences individuals and not groups and culture influences the groups.

VI. THE CROSS-NATIONAL APPROACH

While taking into account the literature on happiness it is found that sociologists have also shown interest in analyzing the social conditions of people and happiness. The cross-national approach produces two outcomes. Firstly, the aim of sociology is the formation of a better society and cross-national happiness research has found solutions to form a better society. Secondly, the cross-national happiness research has focussed on the functions of the social institutions and their future. As per this argument, social institutions such as marriage enhance happiness. Marital happiness has been the subject matter of many studies. A correlation between the higher occupational status and power and the socio-economic status was found. There are such significant variables as sexual satisfaction, age at marriage, emotional rewards and sparing time for the needy, which play a prominent role in enhancing the happiness of the family. It is fascinating to observe that spouses in low-income families often experience stress-related problems in the management of their children. Thus, children and spouses from economically weaker families tend to exhibit a lower level of happiness (Peiro,

2006). Easterlin (2004) mentions family life, matters related to the job, emotional stability with personal worth and self-discipline, etc. as important sources of happiness.

There are also common factors that influence happiness such as income, wealth and health. Apart from the economic conditions, recent studies have also highlighted diverse social conditions which influence the happiness of human beings. Easterlin(2004) presented non-economic factors such as politics and democracy while analysing the cross-national studies on happiness. Haller and Hadler (2006) stated that there is a positive relationship between welfare expenditure and happiness. Tavits (2008) has correlated the performance of the Government and corruption as a key national-level factor negatively related to happiness. He has highlighted the negative effect of corruption on macro-economic factors such as GDP, Inflation and unemployment.

VII. HAPPINESS ACROSS THE WORLD

Happiness is essentially needed for measuring the social life satisfaction of people. Realizing the same, based on various factors such as income, wealth, employment, Government policies, welfare society, etc. a group of independent experts from the United Nations have analysed the status of happiness in various countries across the world. The World Happiness Report 2021 has ranked a total of 149 countries based on the happiness index. Table-1 reveals the happiness index in selected countries:

Table-1: Happiness Index and the Rank of Selected Countries

Countries	Happiness Rank	Happiness Index
Finland	1	7.842
Denmark	2	7.620
United Kingdom	17	7.064
United States	19	6.951
Bangladesh	101	5.025
Pakistan	105	4.934
Sri Lanka	129	4.325
India	139	3.819

Source: World Happiness Report, 2021.

It is highlighted that, of the 149 countries listed, Finland is the first and followed by Denmark in which people are most happy. Similarly, United Kingdom has been ranked 17th position, the United States is ranked in 19th position, even Indian neighbouring countries mainly Bangladesh is ranked as 101, Pakistan is ranked as 105 and Sri Lanka has got 129th rank in terms of happiness. Surprisingly, India stood at 139th Rank among a total of 149 Countries. It shows that the non-happiness of Indian people is a matter of serious concern.

It has been already discussed that many of the factors influence the happiness of people positively or negatively. When the reasons for the lower happiness of people in India are analysed, it is found that there are more negative factors such as adverse policies, corruption, poverty, a lower standard of living, unemployment and under-employment, poor technological developments, unequal distribution of resources, casteism, communalism, terrorism, Naxalism and so on. On the positive side, after globalization, there is an increase in employment opportunities, investment opportunities, industrialization and so on. When the human needs approach is applied to the Indian economy, still there are deaths due to hunger in India, wide disparity between rich and poor, increase in poverty, the surge of Covid19 and such other factors are main reasons for lower happiness. Even living conditions, standard of living, income, etc of the people are poor, which are main factors for happiness as per the relative standards of approach. Further, when the culture of people is revealed, the culture is depending on many of the religious groups, castes and communities, which are orthodox and conventional and vary among various castes, tribes and religions. Due to all these reasons, the people of India are not happier. Of course, India is the second-largest country, with greater cultural diversity, unlike the top-ranked countries mentioned in the above list, has many more challenges in competing with the other nations particularly in keeping its population happy by putting more efforts in the near future.

VIII. CONCLUSION

From the above discussion, it is clear that culture, the standard of living, social conditions, economic factors such as income, wealth, political factors like democracy, Government policies, welfare measures, etc are positively influencing the enhancement of happiness and on the other hand, the corruption, poverty, lower-income, etc have a negative impact on the happiness of individuals. Relative standards approach described that happiness positively associated with the Government policies, welfare schemes, etc. and it would have negative influence on the prevalence of evils like corruption, black money, and so on. To assess the happiness among people of various countries, the experts from the United Nations have prepared the World Happiness Index, which revealed that, people of Finland, Denmark, the United Kingdom, the United States are most happier, even

people of the Indian neighbouring countries, namely Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are also happy compared to the happiness of the people living in India. It shows that many of the factors such as poverty, the lower standard of living, cultural diversity, poor policies of the Government, corruption and such other factors are negatively influencing the happiness of Indians. Of course, happiness is a psychological concept and it is depending on an individual who gives much importance to his or her various needs in the order of preference considering available resources. Further, happiness is determined by the inner mind of individuals and rarely by groups. Hence, it can be concluded that, even though numerous studies have been conducted on happiness, still no consistent results were derived from the happiness research studies. Sociologists have contributed limitedly to happiness studies. However, they are interested in the well being of the people by studying the social context of happiness. Happiness ought to be of substantial interest to Indian sociologists, in the near future, to investigate into the intricacies of life satisfaction.

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Dr. C. Somashekher. "Theoretical Approaches to Happiness." *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 26(06), 2021, pp. 29-33.