

ANALYSING HAPPINESS INDEX AS A MEASURE ALONG WITH ITS PARAMETERS AND STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING INDIA'S RANK IN WORLD HAPPINESS REPORT

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Abstract

Measuring happiness in quantifiable terms is a global phenomenon lately. United Nation's World Happiness Report (WHR) is one such means to analyse the level of subjective wellbeing that countries across the world are living with. The Happiness Index is framed to set various parameters on grounds of which a country could be ranked in a list of 156 countries. India's rank has come down the list this year (2019) to be ranked at the 140th position. This clearly indicates India's deteriorating position down the years. This paper elaborates the concept of Happiness Index as a measure and analyses various reasons for India to lose its position in the World Happiness Report. The author appropriately concludes the paper with suitable suggestions.

Keywords:

Happiness Index, Gross National Happiness, Subjective Wellbeing, Sustainability, Organizational Performance, World Happiness Report

1. INTRODUCTION

Happiness has been a subjective aspect, but lately it has become an object of keen interest for researchers and psychologists to define it precisely, and to understand and find means to stay happy through quantified parameters. Positive psychology research defines a happy person as one who experiences positive emotions such as joy, pride, interest, contentment and infrequent (though not absent) negative emotions such as anxiety, sadness and anger. [1] Nearly 5% of Indians suffer from mental illness [2], whereas mental health, as a topic, is being addressed only in the recent times. Though happiness certainly plays a big role in the way we live our lives, it is difficult to precisely define happiness as it differs from one person to the other. Researchers are yet to arrive at a framework that would measure happiness. Most researchers use satisfaction with life scale (SWLS) to measure life satisfaction and the positive and negative affect schedule (PANAS) to measure positive and negative effects.

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To understand the concept of Happiness Index.
- To analyse World Happiness Report system as a measure to happiness among nations across the world.
- To evaluate parameters of the happiness index.
- To analyse possible reasons for India's declining rank in World Happiness Report and propose strategies to improve the same.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The word "happiness" is often used interchangeably with quality of life [3], subjective wellbeing of a person [4], satisfaction in life and is crucial in maintaining health [5].

Abdel-Khalek [6] stated happiness to be the ultimate aim of human beings and that people seek out for the same. Argyle [7] has stated happiness as a positive inner experience, the ultimate motivator for human behaviour and the degree to which an individual judge his/her life as a whole.

Tashi [8] insisted that happiness must be cultivated through the spirit of right effort and an understanding of the causes and conditions that lead to the phenomenon of happiness. Further, Lynch [9] advices to understand and cultivate happiness by realizing that happiness is an inside job, and that it comes from within and no amount of material gains can get one into a long term state of happiness.

Paul Anand [10] elaborates on happiness, wellbeing and human development as a case study for subjective measures. Laura Musikanski [11] discusses the happiness alliance that builds happiness index as a survey instrument to measure the subjective wellbeing of people and collect relevant data thereon.

Andres Salas Valina [12] studies the impact of happiness on the productivity of employees and their personal lives to maintain a work life balance. The study also discusses nurturing skillful and productive employees to gain a competitive advantage. Bhattacharya and Paul, [13] in their research, study the various means through which India can reach a better position in the World Health Report.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research is mostly fundamental and descriptive in nature. It includes both quantitative evaluation as well as qualitative understanding of the concept. Past trends are observed and graphs and charts are constructed accordingly to understand the future possibilities. Online data available on websites related to world happiness report along with several relevant research papers and articles have been studied to come to a conclusive analysis. Various parameters related to the happiness index have been segregated under relevant heads for conceptual clarity of the paper.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND ANALYSIS OF THE STUDY

4.1 HAPPINESS INDEX AND WORLD HAPPINESS REPORT

The happiness index is a comprehensive survey instrument that assesses happiness, wellbeing and aspects of sustainability and resilience. The collective happiness of a nation can be analysed through this developmental philosophy. Happiness index or "life ladder" can be measured using parameters or key variables such as income, freedom, trust, healthy life expectancy, social support and

generosity. The answers hence obtained are averaged out to a single quantifiable value, which further contributes towards World Happiness Report (WHR). United Nations sustainable development solutions network's annual publication constitutes WHR, containing articles and rankings of national happiness based on respondent ratings of their own lives [2].

WHR was first released in 2012 as a foundational text for the UN's wellbeing and happiness; defining a new economic paradigm. This report outlined the state of happiness across the world, the causes of misery and happiness, the policy implications highlighted by case studies. Gallup world poll data is utilized to form the report each year and WHR is made available to public through website.

When it comes to happiness, Indians consider good financial conditions and physical well-being among the top-most reasons to remain joyous, says a new survey, and goes on to add that India ranked ninth on happiness index among 28 global markets.

As per the 2019 happiness index, Finland is the happiest country in the world. Denmark, Norway, Iceland and Netherlands hold the next top positions. The report was thus published on the 20th of March 2019 by United Nations. Chad, the central African country with a population of 10 million people is considered to be the world's saddest country.

4.2 GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESS

The term, Gross National Happiness (GNH) coined by the 4th king of Bhutan, is a philosophy that guides the government. GNH focuses on calculating the development of a country based on life satisfaction. GNH index is based on four pillars: 1) Sustainable and equitable socio-economic development; 2) Conservation of environment; 3) Preservation and promotion of culture; 4) Good governance.

The GNH index uses sufficiency thresholds that indicate people who score more to be happy to a certain amount. GNH uses three cutoffs 50%, 60%, and 77% for the purpose of categorization. The people who have achieved sufficiency in less than 50% and 50-65% of domains are considered unhappy and narrowly happy respectively and are considered under policy priority. People who achieve sufficiency in 66-76% (6-7 domains) are considered extensively happy.

The people who have achieved sufficiency in 77% domains (i.e. 7 or more) are considered extremely happy. To have a single overall index, the GNH cut off is set at 66% of the variables; that is the middle cut off. This implies that people can be considered happy when they have achieved sufficiency in 66% of the indicators and more.

$$GNH = 1 - (H_n \times A_n) \quad (1)$$

Herewith, H_n indicates % of not yet happy people (1% of happy people) and A_n represents percentage of domains in which not yet happy people lack sufficiency. In Bhutan the GNH was calculated to be 0.743. The domains and indicators are elaborated with detailed parameters to be measured in a questionnaire in Table.2.

Table.1. Domains equally weighed (100%) and a grouping of 33 indicators

Domains	No. of Indicators
Psychological well being	4
Health aspects	4
Time management	2
Educational standards	4
Cultural diversity	4
Good governance	4
Community vitality	4
Ecological diversity and resilience	4
Living standards	3
Total	33

Table.2. Domains and indicators of GNH survey questionnaires

Domains	Indicators
Psychological well being	- Life satisfaction - Positive emotion - Negative emotion - Spirituality
Health aspects	- Mental health - Self-reported health status - Healthy days - Long term disability.
Time management	- Working hours - Sleeping hours
Education	- Literacy - Educational qualification - Knowledge - Values
Culture	- Language (speak native language) - Socio cultural participation - Artisan skills - Etiquette
Good governance	- Political freedom - Service delivery - Political participation
Community vitality	- Social support - Donation of time and money - Community relationships - Safety - Family - Victim of crime
Ecological diversity and resilience	- Pollution - Environment responsibility - Public transport access - Wildlife conflict
Living standards	- Assets - House hold Income - Housing quality

Source: World Happiness Report

The year 2019 witnesses the 7th World Happiness Report based on how happy a nation's citizens perceive themselves to be. Let us understand the pattern of India's rank in the world happiness report, beginning from the first report way back in 2012. The Table.3 represents a declining rank for India over the years since the first report.

Table.3. India's rank in WHR

Year	Agenda	Number of participating countries	India's rank
2012	Worldwide demand for more attention to happiness and absence of misery as criteria for government policy.	156	110
2013	Wellbeing should be a critical component of how world measures it social and economic development.	156	111
2015	Wellbeing and sustainable development	158	117
2016	Happiness as an indicator of quality of human development.	156	118
2017	Redefining growth narrative to put people's wellbeing at the centre of government's efforts.	156	122
2018	Happiness and development of communities.	156	132
2019	Technologies, social norms, conflicts and Govt. policies that have driven changes focusing on subjective wellbeing.	156	140

Source: World Happiness Reports 2012 - 2019

Hence it is clearly observed that India's rank has been constantly deteriorating in the World Happiness Report, almost thirty ranks down in less than a decade. The parameters on the grounds of which the happiness index is to be measured are evidently not being under compliance of either individuals or the organizations. The same has been represented in Fig.1.

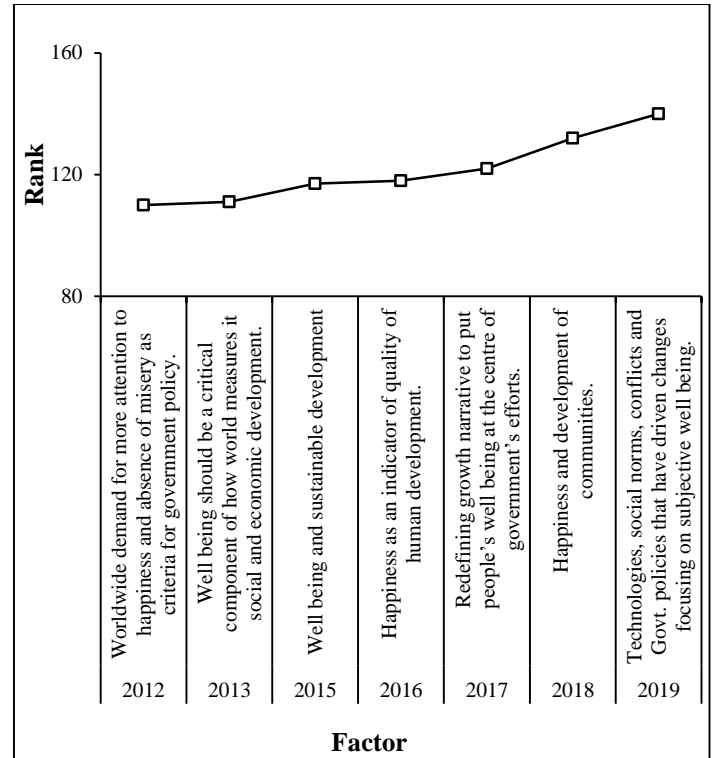


Fig.1. India's declining rank in WHR

5. FINDINGS

We try to figure out possible reasons for this steep decline of India's rank in the world happiness report and can derive the following findings:

- India, despite a fast growth, remains a non-egalitarian nation with high levels of economic inequalities. India's richest 1% has almost 73% of the total wealth created in the economy.
- The public health spending is lower than the global average (SDP's 1.4%) leaving millions deprived for health facilities and infrastructure.
- Average life expectancy in India is 69 years, which is much lower than the world life expectancy average of 74 years.
- India has failed in building trustworthy social support system, assisting people when in need or at times even in real trouble.
- Managing big cash flows in sustainable and transparent manner is difficult in India. This has eventually led to corruption, scam, etc. at the higher levels. This is the reason why India's rank has dropped in the latest global corruption perception index.
- India's lagging response to unresolved cases such as addressing the issues related to refugees, Rohingya crisis, which is an issue for international debate is also another reason for declining rank at the world level.

6. IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

- A theoretical framework is developed herewith to understand happiness index and the various parameters that it revolves around. As happiness is a subjective aspect, quantifying it through new approaches seems a highly productive idea.
- An evaluation of India's position and rank in the world happiness report is made since the conception of the idea of forming WHR and its first launch in 2012.
- An understanding of the reasons of India's declining rank in WHR certainly generates new routes towards improvement. Few have also been discussed by the author in this paper in the form of India's strategies.
- Such evaluation would permit the wellbeing consequences of subsequent events and policy changes to be better assessed.
- Well-being results can be used to suggest alternative ways of designing and delivering public services ranging from elder care and community services, along with public awareness and accepting responsibilities as a good citizen.

The strategies for India to secure a better position in the world happiness index/report:

- Instilling the spirit of generosity and voluntary social service through formation of self service groups and communities in both urban and rural areas across the country.
- Spreading more awareness in connection to protection of environment among people. Promoting sustainable development with incentives at individual, group, and organizational levels.
- Improving public health and medical infrastructure through more public spending and increased funding.
- Restoring the faith of public in governance through maintaining transparency, accountability, and integrity towards its people and bureaucratic operations.
- Social support systems must be constituted to develop moral responsibility of each citizen in development and protection activities that would serve the society.
- Working towards a more equitable society where discrimination on the grounds of gender, religion, culture, and state is dissolved and considered a social evil.

7. CONCLUSION

This paper establishes India's declining position in the World Happiness Report, particularly due to its inability to satisfy the basic set parameters. India would be able to improve its position only when attempts are made to gain happiness in a non-

materialistic way. Altruism and social welfare spirit are to be incorporated in the minds of citizens. Humanity, generosity, and tolerance are to be harmonized with the way of life. The Government must ensure equality, justice, transparency, and accountability. The happiness index and WHR view subjective wellbeing through a highly pragmatic approach. So, it is high time we look beyond our personal benefits while seeking satisfaction. For, nothing but attaining a state of happiness in life can sustain peace of mind for a long period.

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