

GROSS HAPPINESS INDEX: A STUDY ON THE FALLING RATE OF HAPPINESS IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT :

The study makes an attempt to explore the various reasons for the falling rate of Gross National Happiness (GNH) in India, a country where spiritual icons like Gautam Buddha attained enlightenment. The aim of this paper is to find the reasons behind India's rapid fall in GNH, and looking at the problems from multiple dimensions. India's rapid fall since the last 6 years i.e. from 2015 and 117th position it has reached till 144 as per the recent data of 2020. Although the most important things to hold-on to in life are well-being, contentment, happiness, knowledge and love, one cannot deny the fact that the levels of happiness can only be achieved when we are satisfied. People can not think about what makes them happy when they are struggling to make two ends meet. This kind of approach (GNH) is only achievable in countries fulfilling the important factors/aspects such as- good governance, education facilities, socio-cultural values, sustainable - equitable & socio-economic development, good financial and fundamental status. All of this is nothing but basic human needs, which when fulfilled, completely satisfies a human being making it synonymical to happiness. The study will make an in-depth analysis about the factors/aspects mentioned above and how they directly and indirectly affect the happiness levels of our country. Focusing on the aim of the research, we will get to the core of the multiple problems, taking into

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account all the issues and see how these aspects are responsible for the falling GNH in India, and try finding the appropriate solutions towards the end of the research.

INTRODUCTION :

A country should not only be financially rich but also rich in her vivacity. The wealth of a country must be determined by more than just the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and it must be GNH. Among the 156 countries, India's latest rank in the World Happiness Report (WHR) is 144th, lagging behind in GNH is not a new thing for India, but the reports keep falling.

In the present time the only country using the concept is Bhutan, which is also the birthplace of the gross happiness index. It was coined in the 1970's by Bhutan's then king "Jigme Singye Wangchuck". The philosophy guides the government of Bhutan and has been enacted since 2008. Some other countries with excellent GNH according to the 2020 WHR reports are- Finland, Denmark, Switzerland, Iceland and Norway.

The four pillars of Gross Happiness Index include sustainable socio-economic development, cultural preservation, environmental conservation and good governance. The laws in Bhutan are so strict that if you are caught cutting a tree or hunting, you can face life imprisonment. Medical and Educational facilities are absolutely free of cost. Environmental conservation here is so well-maintained that almost 72% of the country is covered with forests which gives a peaceful living space to many endangered species such as- The Bengal Tigers, Snow Leopards and Rhinos. Due to its sincerity in environmental and sustainable development, Bhutan is the only carbon negative country in the world.

India's falling GNH rate sounds like a threat to us, as its citizens we feel that a country like ours, that can achieve so much from its diversity is stuck with a materialistic approach to life. Sadly no one really cares about GNH in India nowadays, we have dedicated our lives to materializing

pleasures, making money and losing all value for emotions. India is the land of Gautam Buddha, the biggest icon of spirituality. It is a land which has its roots deeply embedded into spiritual culture, and the harsh reality is that it has been reduced to 9-5 jobs filled with hustle and stress to an extent that it can cause serious health issues. This kind of approach tricks us into materializing happiness. Problems like economic-divide make the rich richer and poor poorer, and only the ones who can “afford happiness” are happy. The majority population in our country is hustling for nothing, the farmers are not getting proper benefits, labour is being exploited, capitalists are sucking the money out of the middle class’s pockets and the middle class is making a huge investment in a kind of lifestyle that doesn’t make them happy and gives only more stress in return. Giving a thought to what makes us happy has now become a “privileged point-of-view.”

GROSS HAPPINESS INDEX : A CONCEPT

The GNH of a country is measured through the living standards of the citizens that include household income, assets and housing. It is measured on the most basic factors of living, these factors matter to the citizens unconsciously. The use of GNH instead of GNP/GDP is a big Holistic step that Bhutan took, they put more emphasis on the quality of life than quantity of money. It wouldn't be completely right to say that materialistic development does not matter to a country. A growth in the country’s infrastructure, technology and capital is equally important but the factors limiting its growth are directly proportional to the factors affecting the GNH of that country, these factors include low education levels, poor living conditions and lack of basic and necessary infrastructure. The materialistic and spiritual growth of a country should go hand in hand, and a country able to achieve its quality of life will automatically achieve GNH and climb up the ladder in the WHR. The mistake we as a country are making right now is “materializing happiness,” even the poorest sections of the society believe that money will make their life better, so they only live on short-term goals of earning money through daily wages. The problem of poverty gives birth to the problem of overpopulation, the mindset that resides within these underprivileged citizens is,

more the people in family, more the daily-wagers. Their poor living conditions and struggles of life does not allow them to think beyond.

HOW IS THE HAPPINESS INDEX CALCULATED?

In this section we will try to understand how the Happiness Index is calculated by the Global Happiness Council, the group responsible for producing the World Happiness Report every year. In the first ever report by the World Happiness Report in 2012, the respondents were asked to rate their happiness from a scale of 0 to 10. The World Happiness Report calculates the Happiness Index of a country by calculating the average of the survey results of the respondents.

The Global Happiness Council defines Happiness Index as, "The Happiness Index is defined as the weighted (by sampling weights) rate of respondents reporting "Very Happy" or "Quite Happy" less weighted rate of respondents reporting "Not very Happy" or "Not at all Happy", plus 100. The index thus ranges from 0 to 200".

However, the World Happiness Report has changed the way it calculates the Happiness Index in 2018. The new way of measuring the Happiness Index involves a new concept of a "Happiness Ladder". The World Happiness Report of 2018 defines Happiness Index as follows, "Please imagine a ladder, with steps numbered from 0 at the bottom to 10 at the top. The top of the ladder represents the best possible life for you and the bottom of the ladder represents the worst possible life for you. On which step of the ladder would you say you personally feel you stand at this time?". This question has been asked to millions of people, and the data collected has been used to create the Happiness Index every year. Below is the data table of happiness report of India for the last 6 years, our focus here is India's happiness report in particular-

Year (for the last 6 years)	India's ranking in World Happiness Report
2015	117
2016	118
2017	122
2018	133
2019	140
2020	144

CAUSES OF LOW GNH IN INDIA :

There are several factors that influence the GNH of a country. In India in particular, poverty seems to be one of the main reasons that makes it rank so low on the Happiness Index. Poverty affects the lifestyle of roughly 22 percent of the population of India, according to the official data released in 2013 by the Planning Commission. Poverty results in poor living conditions, hygiene, infrastructure and basic amenities which is a serious blow to the quality of life of a large portion of the population of India. Poverty coupled with the insane amount of corruption in the country make for the perfect recipe for such low GNH in India. Government funds which were aimed at ameliorating the plight of the lower section of society are going into the wrong pockets. This makes people who are already well off and content with life, more happy, and people with little to live with, more unhappy. And since India is affected by Collective Poverty, therefore it is unhappy.

Other reasons for such a low Happiness Index in India may include social expectations which makes people do things that would be accepted by the society and by the family, instead of doing

things that actually makes the person happy and satisfied. For instance, people study subjects that they are not interested in, eventually getting them jobs they hate, making them unhappy with their lives. Indian families also put a tremendous amount of pressure on the children to get married once they have reached the "marriageable age". People are forced and pressured into getting married by the family members even when they know they are not ready for marriage. This leads to the person being unhappy in their married life and unhappy with their partner, hence, an unhappy life. Moreover, having children at a young age and not having the income to raise the child in a good environment adds a lot of mental stress on the parents again making them even more unhappy. We also have a serious issue with gender equality in India. Indian women in certain parts of the country, especially rural parts, are not allowed to get an education and are made to stay and work at home. On top of this, the women go through serious stress when it comes to dowry and other practices which seem to have been specially made to mentally torture women. Domestic violence is also rampant in Indian households.

India as a country does not take mental health seriously enough. Around 200 million people in India suffer from depression, this means that one in five people in India is suffering from depression and it makes India the most depressed country in the world, according to a WHO study. Depression and mental stress not only leads to a lower quality of life, but also is a massive blow to the happiness of a person. This is a major cause of such a low Happiness Index in India.

CONCLUSION :

The challenge that India faces regarding a low GNH is not something easy to deal with especially when we consider the enormous population of the country. More than 50% of the population of India is under the age of 25 and about 65% is under the age of 35. The average age of an Indian in 2020 is 29, compared to China's 37 and Japan's 48, India is a country filled with young people. Keeping this in mind, it is extremely alarming that India has such a low Happiness Index, which means that way too many young people are unhappy with their lives. The government plays a

major role in the GNH of a country, especially a country like India where a substantial percentage of the population depends on the government for the most basic of needs.

One way in which the government can help mitigate the rather embarrassing GNH of India is perhaps by focusing more on the things that would make people happy, instead of focusing only on the economic development of the country. Economic development is no doubt important, but a country like India needs economic development of the people in the lowest levels of society and this can be achieved with employment. As a society too, we need to develop a culture where we all look after each other and we need to look at the society as a single entity and not as segregated groups of people. We need to look out for the needs of others as well by helping those in need.

The government is no doubt trying it's best when it comes to providing education to the underprivileged, but unfortunately the government public schools in India are very poorly run. Incompetent and unmotivated teachers ruin the minds of young children, these children then become demotivated and give up on their studies which leads to them not getting a good job when they grow up. Teachers should also perhaps get proper training and coaching before they go out and teach impressionable minds. The education system has a massive role to play when it comes to the happiness of the people, hence, it is imperative that the government take public schools seriously, especially those in villages and rural areas.

The government should work for making appropriate changes in financial policies that work for the benefit of the underprivileged. Be it loans or other forms of financial aid, they should be specifically tailored to suit the underprivileged who make up for quite a percentage of the population of India. Easier financial policies on the underprivileged makes it easier for them to start their own business and make a decent living for themselves, thereby increasing their happiness. Government schemes dedicated to the underprivileged should not go into the pockets of corrupt officials or politicians. The government should have a strong anti corruption unit both at the center and in the states to combat corruption. Corruption is one adversity facing India that makes a huge dent on the happiness of the people. Solving corruption in India would be one of the biggest steps that the country can take to step up in the Happiness Index.

When it comes to Government workers, certain steps can be taken by the government to try to make the working life of the employees much healthier and better. The government can give mandatory recreational holidays for the employees once in a while after so much stress at the workplace. By doing this, not only does the government make the employees happier, but also gives them the motivation to work hard and do better. This increases their productivity and it is a win-win situation for both parties. It is sometimes the smallest steps that make the biggest difference.

Regarding children, the government can hold regular cultural programs in which the children can participate in. It is important for children to get involved in cultural and social activities from a young age, so that they learn to be responsible citizens when they grow up. Holding cultural and social activities not only makes the children happier but also makes them responsible citizens. Giving away free books to underprivileged children and giving them stationary items which they can use to explore their talents is a great way for the government to make the lives of the underprivileged happier.

Indian social expectations is also something that needs to change if we are ever going to become a happier country. Family expectations of their children and social expectations put way too much stress on the young people, especially those who are unmarried. As a society, we need to be more accepting of the differences that we have and be more open minded towards other people's situation. If we all had the ability to accept each other, then we would all be better off and we would all be happier. Changing the way our society is can be a daunting task, but we can perhaps achieve that through education. Education not only of the young and impressionable minds, but also of the elders in society who are perhaps unenthusiastic about having their minds changed. But if we are able to change the way the elders in the society think, and change the culture of social expectations in the country, then we would be a much happier country. The views on gender equality should also change in India, we need to realise how important it is to get girls educated. Parents who love their daughters will send their daughters to school to make them educated and

get a good job and be independent. The government should take serious action against any form of domestic violence and should charge those accountable with serious charges according to the law. This would discourage any form of violence in the domestic environment and would keep people happier.

Mental health is something that India needs to be serious about and the government needs to do something about it. Mental health care centers should be set up with professional doctors and psychiatrists. They should not charge a huge amount for consultation and treatment so that it is accessible to all walks of Indian society. The society should also change its views on those with mental health issues and be more accepting of them. If we are able to do this, then it means that 200 million people in India would be happy and hence our Happiness Index would definitely rise. Another major reason that affects the GNH is the natural habitat or the environment of the concerned country. People living in an open environment and breathing in fresh air tend to be much more happy than the ones living in polluted, contaminated air. Another linked and a very important key to environmental conservation is sustainable development, it means that we use the natural resources such as fossil fuels, in such a way that we also save it for our future generations and cleanliness drives such as “swachh bharat abhiyan” is what India needs right now, these kind of initiatives motivate the citizens to do something good for the country and make it a better place to live. The last major problem with our system is “reservation,” that is being given to the lower castes for multiple generations now. And now that they have made a respectable place in society, it's time that those rights are given to someone who's in need of it, such as people living below the poverty line, or handicaps, as they are the ones who are actually in need of it and this would do them some good. Caste system is long gone, and now the situation is such that if reservation stays, the caste system will stay! The ultimate goal is to achieve happiness, and above mentioned are the ways and solutions towards our goal.

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