

Development as Happiness By Prahlad Singh Shekhawat

It is being realized that for true well-being and for a good fulfilling quality life, external social, economic and environmental development should lead to or be accompanied by internal satisfaction and happiness or subjective well-being. Development has been conventionally reduced to economic growth and GDP, ignoring equity, human development, quality relationships, unpaid work, environmental depletion and subjective fulfillment. On the other hand happiness in the narrow sense of simply desire satisfaction and instant gratification is limiting and not meaningful and genuinely fulfilling. Therefore well-being including subjective well-being is a broader and more value laden concept. Here we will be concerned with subjective well-being or happiness in a broader sense of satisfaction with life over a long period of time and the conditions favorable for its achievement

Both Aristotle in the Western tradition and Dalai Lama today in the East, agree that happiness is so essentially important because it is an end in itself and we pursue other goals because they can lead us to happiness which therefore should be the main purpose of life.

Aristotle advocated the concept of eudemonia roughly translated as happiness which was to be achieved by being virtuous and by leading a life of reflection and in pursuit of wisdom. Dalai Lama whose book *The Art of Happiness* which was on the best seller list for years and which contains conversations with a Western psychiatrist emphasizes the power of compassion and love for all as a happiness therapy. Compassion in a world where we are all interrelated in a mutually supportive manner is twice blessed, benefiting the receiver as well as the giver

Many wise people across cultures have described their peak experiences as occurring while communing in or with nature or just being in nature. The sages of India (as also elsewhere) with its 'aranya' or forest civilization lead a life of contemplation and communion in nature which resulted in some profound experiences and insights. It has been found that children who are hyper active and have attention deficit tend to calm down when taken to places of natural beauty. Connecting with nature in a sense connects one with one's true and harmonious self which leads one to being at peace and at ease with the world. Peace and harmony within is deeply related to the sustained balance in the ecology of nature. In Wordsworth's words:

To her fair works did Nature link
The human soul that through me ran;
The budding twigs spread out their fan,
To catch the breezy air;---
There was pleasure there
If such be Nature's holy plan,
Have I not Nature's reason to lament
What man has made of man?

Long time ago when the subject of economics was part of philosophy and ethics, J S Mill advocated the aim of good economics to be the greatest happiness of the greatest number. He defined happiness as fulfillment of desires but desires were to be divided into lower and higher types. The pursuit of life, liberty and happiness is inscribed in the American constitution as cardinal principles, although in the American ethic and tradition sadly the pursuit of happiness tends to be reduced to the happiness of the free market and private property. The philosopher Bertrand Russel in his book: *The Conquest of Happiness*, proposed that a life of both social engagement and reflection was more satisfying. In his own life he found happiness in love, pursuit of knowledge and in sympathy for the poor

Recently Richard Layard professor at the London School of Economics argues in his book “*Happiness: Lesson From a New Science*”, that public policy should be devoted to increasing happiness rather than wealth or success. Similarly Paul Martin in his book “*Making Happy People*” proposes how we can bring up our children to be happy because happiness is arguably the most important thing in life. However Natasha Walker reviewing recent books on happiness in the *Guardian* suggests that we can increase the sum total of happiness not as an end in itself but as a side effect of other pursuits like justice, freedom and love.

Some philosophers, artists and thinkers maintain that life becomes enriched, creative and enhanced by the experience of psychological distress and challenges of life and by the pursuit of wisdom and noble values which are more important than happiness. Even though more social relationships are advised for happiness the German poet Rilke in his *Letters To a Young Artist* professed a life of solitude and contemplation for any artist or a creative person

It is widely accepted that first minimum basic social and economic needs have to be met before subjective well-being can be developed. Others like some Buddhists believe that subjective happiness exists relatively independently of social and economic factors and it is more important how people react internally to the outer reality. Most scholars point out the requisites of basic needs and relatively comfortable economic and social conditions. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs in terms of firstly security, secondly emotional needs, thirdly needs for self esteem and finally need for self actualization, still remains a significant benchmark to build the pyramid of well-being

Problems persist about finding cross-cultural and meaningful measures of subjective well-being which do not reduce happiness to Western hedonistic individualism or American pop psychology which lays too much stress on the romantic power of rosy affirmations. In Western culture much emphasis is laid on personal and individualist forms of happiness while in the non-western, particularly in the East, people seek happiness more as part of a collective for example in terms of family or community norms.

Some years ago the King of Bhutan suggested the idea of Gross National Happiness (GNH). It represents a general aspiration towards environmental conservation, culture promotion, equitable growth, community living and emotional well-being. Recently

indicators have also been developed. Instead of the gross sounding term gross which is an aggregated measure that ignores the issue of equity and distribution a better term would be simply national equitable happiness index. Secondly more spiritual and psychological goals need to be developed. Yet the idea of GNH is very significant because it is transforming the discourse of development and well-being and helping in redefining priorities

A survey of literature on well-being, cross-cultural human values, psychological assessments, and social indicators reveals the following common features. Survival (health, safety), Work and leisure (employment, quality of work and leisure), Knowledge (education and ability to learn from life experience), Relationships (personal including family and professional, trust), Empowerment and participation (self-dignity, democratic participation and participation in decisions that shape one's life), Identity and Creativity (meaning in life, culture and arts) Peace and Harmony (spirituality, world outlook including harmony with nature and with one's true nature, peace within and outside)

The Canadian Council for Social Development describes quality of life in terms of Being, which includes firstly health, psychological (thoughts and feelings), spiritual (beliefs and values), secondly in terms of Belonging which includes physical (living place), social (people around), community resources, and thirdly it denotes Becoming which includes practical (daily things to do), leisure (for fun and enjoyment), growth (coping with change). The WIDER Institute in Finland advocates a simple approach, which consists of outer qualities, which are living in a good environment and being of worth for the world, and inner qualities, which are being able to cope with life and enjoying life.

A Welfare Index has been evolved for Scandinavian countries, which combines the three aspects of having, loving and being. The index includes income, quality of housing, political support, social relations, health, education, being irreplaceable, doing interesting things, and life satisfaction. The WHO Quality of Life indicators include physical environment, home environment, financial resources, social support, safety, information, and transportation. The inner quality consists of physical health, mental health, work capacity, learning capacity, energy, absence or presence of pain and depression, satisfaction with self, and satisfaction with life.

The New Economic Foundation in London have developed a Happy Planet Index which combines measures for sustainable use of natural resources with indicators for long and happy life. On the basis of its findings the foundation argues that to live happy and long life one does not have to consume natural resources extravagantly but that we can find fulfillment through non economic factors like quality relationships and community engagement. Similarly Positive Psychology proposes good personal and social relations, doing fulfilling work through excelling in what one is good at and finding meaning through larger and altruistic purpose. Professor Seligman the founder of positive psychology suggests three types of happiness. First is related to pleasure, second is concerned with social engagement and third focuses on finding meaning and purpose in life

The countries of Scandinavia have consistently achieved very high ranking in terms of human development and well-being. Denmark is probably the most equal society and also the happiest according to some studies. Norway is on top of the gender equity scale. Scandinavia enjoys very high level of trust and peace in their societies. Why they score high is not only because they are homogenous societies with little history of wars and with a high standard of income but also because they have charted a third humane and caring way trying to overcome the ills of both capitalism and socialism.

Some objections have been raised to the major approaches to measure well-being. The first one focuses on opulence and consumption of more and more goods and acquisitions. It does not lead to a good quality of life because it ignores good relationships, social and ethical values and a sustainable relationship with the environment. The second approach lays stress on fulfillment of desire, pleasure and the utilitarian ethic of greatest happiness of the greatest number. By emphasizing the majority viewpoint it ignores justice for deprived minorities, tribals, lower castes, migrants and those displaced by big dams or big development projects. The third approach concerned purely with subjective feelings of well-being, for example poor people's subjective feelings of well-being are problematic because as Amartya Sen says their subjective perception and expectations can be restricted to such an extent that they either do not recognize or are unable to articulate their basic needs and their needs for well-being and dignity

Objections that the pursuit of happiness ignores the need for justice, eradication of poverty and social and ecological responsibility have to be seriously taken into account. Most studies agree that up to a certain level improvement in economic standards directly leads to increase in happiness which supports the idea of basic needs first for the poor as a precondition for happiness. The studies also indicate that after achieving certain comfortable economic standards, there are diminishing returns in relation to happiness. Affluence has increased hugely but no corresponding increase in happiness has taken place.

This implies firstly the need to then focus on enhancing non economic factors and secondly it becomes logical and desirable to redistribute wealth from the very rich who do not derive happiness from it to the poor who will gain greater corresponding happiness through this wealth. Even after satisfactory material comforts have been achieved people who otherwise should feel happy actually feel dissatisfied and resentful when they compare themselves with those better off. This phenomenon supports the argument for reducing inequalities to enhance happiness in society. Affluence for its own sake apart from not being conducive to happiness also leads to hedonist consumerism which is destructive of the environment. Also enabling the poor so that they are empowered to define and rate their happiness levels and satisfaction with life is a positive grass roots exercise in defining well-being which has been too long left to experts and bureaucrats in a top down approach

Economic standards particularly in the West in the last fifty years (and recently elsewhere) have grown enormously but no corresponding increase in happiness has taken

place. This is partly due to ever rising expectations from life and the greater awareness and detection of mental health problems. But generally the incidence of depression, breakdown of families, the lack of a feeling of community, social-psychological dissonance and lack of meaning especially among the young which results in anomie, addiction to drugs, to electronic and cyber world, and to sex have increased manifold. Meaningless affluence for its own sake may actually lead to the disease of what has been called “affluenza”. Happiness cannot buy money but after a certain stage of material comfort money cannot buy happiness either and at that stage it is not worth buying anyway

PS I will add the references soon

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