

## DOES HAPPINESS HAPPEN TO WOMEN?: A GENDER PERSPECTIVE ON HAPPINESS QUOTIENT

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### ABSTRACT

*The term happiness quotient (HQ) unlike IQ, EQ, SQ and AQ is still struggling to be accepted as standardized concept in psychology or social sciences. Since happiness is complex and subjective, therefore, there is no universally accepted formula or measurement for happiness quotient. The arithmetic formula  $\text{Dividend} \div \text{Divisor} = \text{Quotient}$  can't simply be applied to happiness because of paradoxical nature of happiness. Firstly, 'Happiness is something that multiplies when it is divided.' Secondly, 'Happiness is found by giving it away.' Thirdly, 'The more we wish to be happy, the less likely we succeed.' Above all, it is difficult to quantify happiness. The levels of happiness range from 'laetus, felix, beatitudo and sublime beatitudo.' Experience of happiness varies from pleasure, delight, joy to ecstatic bliss. These attributes of happiness make it a herculean task to assess the happiness quotient. When happiness is discussed in context of women and that too Indian women, it becomes more intricate and multifaceted concept because Indian women are conditioned to relate their happiness to that of their male counterparts and family. Still Happiness quotient can be sensed by considering the emotional, physical, spiritual, environmental, social, occupational, and intellectual aspects of one's life. This research paper is a humble attempt to examine women's well-being that is more nuanced and inclusive, considering a broader range of variables and experiences that contribute to their happiness.*

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**Keywords:** Happiness Quotient, Social Conditioning, Genetic Orientation, Intentional Activities.

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### Introduction

*Happiness Happens.*

*Osho "Joy- The Happiness That comes From Within"*

Sounds strange but Indian philosopher and mystic Osho firmly believes that happiness can't be managed, manufactured, or arranged, it just happens. This philosophical premise fetches a plethora of questions to a rational mind. What is happiness? Does it really happen? Does it equally happen to all? Happiness is the most complex and subjective concept yet the most coveted one also. Happiness means thousand things to thousand people. To some, it is the secretion of dopamine, serotonin, endorphins, and oxytocin. To some, it is gratification of senses and ego while for others, it lies in aesthetic or spiritual fulfilment. For a few, happiness means the trio of health, hope and harmony. This is the reason happiness quotient is still a baffling term unlike Intelligence Quotient and Emotional Quotient. There is no universally accepted and standardized measure for happiness quotient. However, it can be interpreted as a subjective measure of an individual's or a society's overall level of happiness or well-being. This measurement may consider various factors such as life satisfaction, positive emotions, fulfilment of basic needs, purposeful holistic work-life balance, feeling of satisfaction, self-worth, and overall quality of life. In nut shell, any discussion on happiness quotient considers the emotional, physical, spiritual, environmental, social, occupational, and intellectual well-being of one's life.

In words of Mahatma Gandhi "Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony." Looking to this definition, happiness can't easily happen to half of the Indian population that are women. So many censorship are there in their way to happiness. Majority of the

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Indian women are hardly free to speak up their minds. Exercising their will and thoughts is a mirage for most of them, especially, in rural areas. Ask a few simple questions to a village woman – Does your opinion matter to your family? Do you tell them when you disagree? Can you talk about anything with your spouse? Are you allowed to take decisions about things? Are you free to use your savings or finances as per your choice? Do you get leisurely time for yourself? Do you get adequate food and sleep? The response will shake the myth of women-empowerment and women-wellbeing. Happiness has really become a serious issue. It is very much apparent from India's 126<sup>th</sup> position among 137 countries, in the World Happiness Index 2023. It is shocking to find that Indians are unhappy than people in politically instable Bangladesh, economically collapsed Sri Lanka, war-wrecked Ukraine, and extremist Pakistan. But the second thought makes it easily digestible because how a country can be happy 'if the women are assailed for their idiosyncratic beliefs and privileges. Raped, butchered, domestically incapacitated, and proffered to be a resistant molecule in the atom of family life, she is an abandoned soul blanketed by the perfidy and prolificacy of indissoluble patriarchy.' These bitter words by a young blogger Harsimaran Kaur are better than butter up. This is the stark reality. The powerful patriarchal agencies like religion, family, education, the arts, knowledge system etc. reinforce women's physical, emotional, and intellectual surrogacy. Women are still a prey to gender prototyping regardless of race, religion, nationality, and era. The result is incessant atrocities namely feticide, infanticide, malnutrition, medical neglect, deprivation of education, child marriage, sati, sexual abuse, lesser remuneration for the same work, forced marriage, rape, alcoholism, prostitution, sexual harassment, wife battering, bride-burning, witch hunting and dowry harassment goes unabated. How can one expect Indian woman to be happy in such abysmal surroundings.

Let us examine the situation from a feminist stance. Kate Millet, the American feminist, and educator, in *Sexual Politics* (2000) makes it very clear that gender characteristics are structured by 'sexual politics' that operates through law, religion, culture and society. Her study fits in the Indian milieu as well. In India, these forms of patriarchal control work to construe and curb women and conditions/train/prescribe women to internalize their inadequacy until it is psychologically established. Gradually, women start losing confidence in their own capabilities. Secondly, the veneer of modernity has aggravated this internal conflict since woman is expected to be smart, educated but at the same time brought up to treat a man right and not talk back. Thirdly, women aren't come out of the cocoon of wifehood. Many times, they ignore the atrocities and violence just to sustain the institution of marriage and security of wifehood. Fourthly, Indian women's move from feminine to female is also partial in a way. They have come out of their four inches ivory still they are reluctant to come out of their centuries old obsession with 'the concept of duty-how a woman should behave toward her parents, her husband, her in-laws, her children' is yet to overcome. That's why Lalita Nijhawan an entrepreneur and educationist observes "Women are unhappier than men, women are unhappier than their predecessors, and currently women are at the peak of liberation and empowerment than ever before." It is very ironical and paradoxical.

It is commendable that Indian states like Madhya-Pradesh and Andhra-Pradesh have exclusively set up Happiness Departments and Commissions to evolve standardized index to measure happiness. Happiness of Indian women is influenced by a multitude of factors, including social, economic, cultural, and individual circumstances. Efforts to improve the overall well-being and happiness of Indian women often involve addressing issues related to gender equality, education, healthcare, economic opportunities, and mental health support. Progress is being made, but challenges remain in ensuring the well-being and empowerment of women across the country. No doubt, India has taken strides over the last decade in diminishing gender disparity, yet there are some glaring issues that seek attention. Let us glance over the progress that has been made to increase women's happiness in various domains.

According to a study by Globocan 2020, in India, every four minutes a woman is diagnosed with breast cancer. It is very frightening that for every two women diagnosed with breast cancer, one dies of it. India accounts for the highest number of cervical cancer cases in Asia, followed by China, according to a latest Lancet study on the disease. Studies have shown that around 50 million women in India suffer from reproductive health problems. Such alarming situation indicates that access to quality **healthcare** is essential for the well-being of women. In India, there have been efforts to improve maternal and child healthcare, increase awareness of women's health issues, and expand access to healthcare services in rural areas. *Chuppi Todo* and *Garima Campaign* for menstrual hygiene, *Janani Suraksha Yojana* (JSY), *Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan* (PMSMA), *LaQshya'* programme (Labour Room Quality Improvement Initiative) to enhance reproductive and maternal health of women are a few among them.

However, disparities in healthcare access and outcomes still exist. Along with physical health, their mental health should also be taken care of. Access to **mental health** services is improving, but there is still a long way to go. There is need to inculcate and induce positive psychology among girls right from the early age. It promotes emotional strengths, mental strengths, identity strengths, relational strengths, and resilience, rather than solely focusing on mental illness and dysfunction. Addressing issues like **child marriage and female foeticide** is essential for the well-being of girls and women. These practices can have lifelong negative consequences on their physical and mental health. There is no denying the fact that **education** empowers women, enhances their economic opportunities, and contributes to their overall well-being. Efforts have been made to improve female literacy rates in India. Campaigns like *Beti Padhao*, *Beti Bachao*, Gender Advancement for Transforming Institutions (GATI), Knowledge Involvement in Research Advancement through Nurturing (KIRAN), *CBSE UDAAN* Scheme are some of them. Despite these initiatives disparities still persist, particularly in rural areas. As per UNESCO data India is on the lowest position with only 14% of women researchers in STEM field which can't be ignored. Another crucial factor to the well-being of women is their **economic independence**. It not only increases their productivity but also enhances their societal and cultural standing. Initiatives like *Mahila E-Haat*, STEP, *Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojna*, microfinance, and skill development programs have aimed to empower women economically. However, there is still a gender pay gap, and women's participation in the formal labour force remains lower than desired. Along with economic opportunities, ensuring the **safety and security of women** is critical for their happiness and well-being. Endeavours to improve safety through initiatives like increased police presence, helplines, and public awareness campaigns can't be ignored. The Ministry of Women and Child Development has implemented '*Mission Shakti*,' an Integrated Women Empowerment Programme, as Umbrella Scheme for the Safety, Security and Empowerment of Women. However, concerns about women's safety, particularly in urban areas, remain. Women in India are still not free from fear of getting groped on public transport. **Gender equality** must be prioritized and women should be empowered to take leadership roles in all spheres of life to vouchsafe their well-being. This will pave way for more inclusive and just society and will greatly contribute to higher levels of happiness. Strong family and social support systems can contribute to the well-being of Indian women. Close-knit family structures often provide emotional support, but they can also be sources of pressure and expectation. Social networks and support groups can offer additional avenues for support. Awareness of **legal rights** and their effective implementation are crucial for the well-being of women. The Constitution of India guarantees equality to all Indian women: Article 14, no discrimination by the State: Article 15 (1), equality of opportunity (Article 16), equal pay for equal work: Article 39(d). In addition, it allows special provisions to be made by the State in favour of women and children: Article 15(3), renounces practices derogatory to the dignity of women: Article 51(A) (e), and allows provisions to be made by the State for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief: Article 42. In the last decade India has made progress in enacting laws to protect women's rights and combat gender-based violence, challenges related to dowry, domestic violence, sexual harassment and unequal treatment. Still the situation of women has not improved as expected. A significant change has come but it is still fragmentary. Now certainly, the birth of a girl child is not objected to but the longing for a male child still lingers on. By far men have started sharing their opportunities with women but they are not ready to share their authority. Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan, the Indian feminist author and professor explores the dialectic of state and civil society via gender. She notes that the Indian constitution promises equality and freedom from discrimination, but this does not work for women. Women continue to be governed by personal laws of their community, and their exploitation goes unabated.

Having viewed happiness from social and feminist perspective let us understand happiness from psychological aspect also. Prof. Sonja Lyubomirsky, the renowned psychologist and writer of *The How of Happiness* (2007) and *The Myth of Happiness* (2013), has suggested that an individual's happiness hinges upon three dimensions: Genetic Set Point, Life Circumstances, and Intentional activities. **Genetic Set Point** signifies that everyone is born with a heritable predisposition that determines his/her happiness set point. This baseline level of happiness is encoded in genes. The tendency of hedonic adaptation makes people to quickly return to their baseline level of happiness after experiencing positive or negative life events. Happiness set point is thought to be relatively stable and hereditary, accounting for about 50% of a person's overall happiness. **Life Circumstances** include external situations like one's education, income, job and living standard etc., which have 10% share in one's happiness. The remaining 40% is within an individual's control. It can be influenced by **intentional activities and practices** which incorporates practicing gratitude, performing acts of kindness, setting, and working towards meaningful goals, be willing to change and adapt and cultivating positive relationships. Prof. Lyubomirsky's has provided a valuable insight into the pursuit of happiness. Her theory leads to the fact

that while genetics and life circumstances play a role in determining happiness. A significant portion of our well-being is within our control. Visualized in this light it can be comprehended that all the government initiatives and campaigns discussed above work only for 10% of their happiness, the major chunk of happiness depends largely on the intentional activities of women.

The saying of His Holiness the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama is perfectly in sync with this finding. "Happiness is not something ready-made. It comes from your own actions. "Women will have to make efforts on their own to attain their rightful position. Unless and until women do it, no constitution or law can serve them with their rights. Women must realize that existence is not merely a succession of role and explore their potential as an individual entity. They have their own share of complexities and competence; success and failures, as significant as men, and that must be acknowledged by society. Like anyone else, Indian women have their own dreams and aspirations. Achieving personal goals and fulfilling one's potential can be a great source of happiness for them. Involvement in social and community activities, participation in cultural events, or being part of social groups can provide a sense of belonging and purpose to women that automatically can lead to feeling of fulfilment and happiness. For this, women need to come out of self-censorship and their obsession with duty. One can't pour from empty cup. A woman unhappy at heart can't keep her surroundings happy. The former President of India, the legendary A.P.J. Abdul Kalam once said "When the woman is happy, the home is happy. When the home is happy, the society is happy and when the society is happy the state is happy and when the state is happy there will be peace in the country and it will develop at greater pace." What can state better than this, the undisputable importance of women's happiness. Indian women have got to accept that self-care is not selfishness. Being a sponge, absorbing everything triggers emotional and mental disorders which ultimately lead to unhappiness. A woman can enjoy freedom and happiness only when she knows what it means to be free and happy. She must be free to choose, to decide, to administer, and to earn her own money in a dignified way. Above all she needs to be free from the expectations and judgment of society. India is full of diversity, and wellbeing of women can vary widely based on factors like geo-political position, socioeconomic status, and cultural background. Efforts to improve the well-being of Indian women often involve a combination of policy changes, social awareness campaigns, community-level initiatives and above all the realization by women that they don't just need happiness, they deserve it. Happiness can HaPPen to woman only when she Pens (writes) her Hap (Luck, Fortune).

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