

HAPPINESS AND UNHAPPINESS IN RURAL AREAS: MEANING, CAUSES AND VARIATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The objective of the study was to understand the meaning, causes, variations and coping strategies of happiness and unhappiness. Data was collected using scales, interviews and observation in the rural areas, on 50 head of the families. The respondents mostly belonged to OBC caste category and family structure varied from nuclear, lineal, and joint to collateral families. Data was analyzed manually and chi squares, net balances and cross tabulations were done. Findings of the study reveal that most respondents are unhappy in their life because their net balances are negative. Respondents have experienced achievement, life cycle events, social support and spiritual events as a source of happiness. These events promote their sustainability of livelihood. The sources of unhappiness are emphasized in terms of loss of life, loss of crop productivity, failure in life, loss of property, breach of trust and breakdown of social cohesion. Literature also supports these findings.

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INTRODUCTION

Happiness is a psychological state of mind:

Happiness is not only hard to comprehend but also difficult to define. In the discipline of philosophy happiness is defined “the emotional wholeness and well being of the personality, produced by activities and relationships which lead to a self-fulfillment appropriate to the age and aptitudes of the individual involved”. So, happiness and well being are used synonymously and it means the total positive emotional state of individual’s personality which comes through certain activities and relationships with others. It shows the ways of being happy and satisfied. Happiness varies according to the age and potential ability of the individual.

Indian philosopher, Sri Aurobindo (1972) believed “true happiness lies in finding and maintenance of a natural harmony of spirit, mind and body.” Such natural harmony of spirit, mind and body is an ideal stage that can be achieved by people who are interested in otherworldliness or we can say who are more spiritual. Thus happiness comes from the satisfaction of soul but not from the vitals’ or the body alone. It cannot be achieved by materialistic people, who are less interested in spiritualism. If our soul is satisfied then we are happy. Thus the activities need to be oriented to the otherworldly.

Oxford English Dictionary defines happiness ‘as a state of well-being characterized by emotions ranging from contentment to intense joy.’ According to Collins Essential Thesaurus happiness ‘is an emotion experienced and a state of wellbeing.’ Thus linguistically happiness is treated as a positive emotional state of individual. It includes self satisfaction, intense joy etc. Thus both philosophically and linguistically happiness means an emotional state that is positive and achieved through activity and social actions and relationships. Such positive emotional states are manifested through feelings of self-satisfaction and intense joy.

Similarly, in the discipline psychology happiness is defined as an agreement of a person’s inner life with the realities of his outer experience and satisfaction. When happiness is treated synonymous with subjective well-being, then happiness involves both cognitive and affective evaluation of a person’s total life. Thus happiness is not a momentary feeling; this is a relatively long-lasting state. This evaluation may also occur in the affect system when people experience unpleasant or pleasant moods or emotions. Affect is a term that includes both moods and emotions, both of which can be described as pleasant or unpleasant. On the whole, happiness is a positive emotional feeling that exists in each and everybody’s life and it is holistic and covers

major aspects of one's own life. These emotional feelings are related to the activities and relationships and vary along age and potential ability or aptitude of the individual. Once we take the happiness is positive emotional state in one's own life then implicitly there are other types of emotional feelings that are both negative and neutral. Net balance of these emotional feelings may lead to positive emotional feelings, happiness or negative emotional feelings unhappiness in once own activities and social relations.

Happiness in the West

The concept of happiness and subjective well-being has been used interchangeably in the literature of psychology. It is a psychological construct and the meaning of which everybody knows but none can define it (Argyle, 2001, Diener, 1984). Happiness is a subjective well being and concerned with "satisfaction with life as a whole. Lyubomirsky (2000) argued that there is considerable agreement in the Western literature on the meaning of happiness and whether it has been achieved or not. It refers to "the experience of joy" contentment or positive well-being, combined with a sense that one's life is good, meaningful, and worthwhile"

Wilson (1967) had concluded that correlates of a happy person are "young, healthy, well-educated, extroverted, optimistic, worry free, religious, married persons with high self-esteem, job morale, modest aspirations, of either sex and of wide range of intelligence" with a comfortable income, robust health, a supportive marriage, and lack of tragedy or trauma in their lives (Argyle 2001; Diener et al., 2000) .Diener (2000) found four attitudes that characterize happy people: self esteem, optimism, extraversion and a sense of personal mastery or control. These attitudes can be self fulfilling, leading happy people to experience more positive events and more fulfilling social relationship, which can further enhance an aggregate of life satisfaction and the balance of effect is high satisfaction with their lives in specific domains such as work, friendship, marriage, health and the self and frequent positive moods. Loneliness, that is social isolation, is negatively correlated with happiness, especially in older adults (Lee & Ishii - Kuntz, 1987), and positively correlated with depression (Seligman, 1991)

Researchers in recent years are now less interested simply in describing the demographic characteristics and life events as they do not predict more than 8 to 15 percent of the variance of happiness (Andrews & Withey 1976). Therefore in recent years efforts have been directed towards understanding the processes that lead to happiness i.e. activities, their meanings, social

relations and interactions. This trend gives a greater recognition to the role played by people's goals, their coping efforts and dispositions.

Happiness in the Indian Context

The Indian tradition, since ancient times, has recognized the natural desire of all human beings to be happy at every stage in every aspect of life. "Let all people be happy" (Sarve bhawantu Sukhinah) has been the highest ideal of human life. The Careka-Samhita, the ancient work on the Hindu system of medicine, described the concept of Sukhswarup (happy life) the Sanskrit equivalent of happiness, that is 'sukham' (Su = plenty, Kham = space) indicates that the state of happiness is a natural state of (limitless) space. According to Bhagavad Gita, a happy state indicates larger accommodative mental space within the individual (Menon, 1998). In day-to-day situation the younger ones are blessed with Khush raho (be happy) by their elders. A number of terms including sukh, mast, santosh, santushti, aram, anand, harsh, Khushi, prasanna etc., are used to express the happy state of an individual. Santoshamm param sukham (contentment is the highest happiness) has been the motto of Indian philosophy, which can be attained through total immersion in dharma. The goal of a welfare state is also to achieve happiness for the people. The measures adopted for the upliftment of the poor (e.g. poverty alleviation programs) are meant to improve the quality of life and bring happiness to them.

The unhappiness or misery can be the result of the acts of other human beings or can be caused by the natural farces or acts in this life or in previous births. According to Hindu philosophy of Prarabdha Karmas, the happiness or sorrow one gets in the present life is a consequence of actions performed by him both in the present and past lives. It is therefore possible that right actions in this life may be accompanied by sorrow and wrong ones by happiness as a result of consequences of actions in past lives (Chaturvedi, 2001).

Indian Empirical studies:

Maurya & Gill (2012) found that psychological well being of married and unmarried research scholars was significantly, positively correlated with family, friends, living environment and self. Literature surveys of Psychology (e.g. Mitra, 1972; Pareek, 1980; Pandey, 1988, 2000) and education in the Indian context reveals that much attention was given to mental health, mental illness, stress and anxiety, aggression, security-insecurity, juvenile delinquency, adjustment, mental retardation and errors of human beings. A quick search through subject indices of these

volumes failed to locate even the word happiness. This indicates that psychology in India did not pay much attention to happiness. However it could be located in few studies. Sinha (1969) examined the concept of happy life among Indian farmers in his comparative study of developed and under-developed villages of Uttar Pradesh. The respondents in the developed village are more reality oriented and clearer about the psychological needs of prestige, status, recreation, values and ideals occupied a secondary place in their need-value structure and happy life. In contrast the respondents of under-developed village are frequently vague, undefined, and they entertained unrealistic wishes and aspirations.

Purpose—study has the following objectives:

1. To understand the meaning of happiness and unhappiness of rural people, some of the most important activities in life that facilitated happiness and unhappiness. In general the meaning of happiness and unhappiness and the activities related to their happiness and unhappiness and net balance of these feelings.
2. How the net balance of happy and unhappy emotions can be explained?

Assumptions of the Study: The study is based on the following assumptions: The meaning of happiness & unhappiness varies across cultures. Secondly happiness and unhappiness are the integral part of life i.e., two sides of the same coin. It means that there is a net balance of happiness and unhappiness in one's own life. Thirdly there are various processes that results in happiness and they cope with unhappiness and happiness through different mechanisms

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Ugrasenpur village located about 50 Kilometers from Allahabad City in Uttar Pradesh (India). The village was selected on the basis of existing contacts with the villagers. A pilot study was conducted to find out the activities and social relations that are perceived as contributors to happiness and unhappiness. On these activities and relations five point scales was constructed. It was supplemented with narrations of lived meanings of 50 head of the household aged 35-70 yrs. Their occupations were farming, wage employment and self employment.

Measures: In order to comprehend the meaning, causes, variations and coping of happiness and unhappiness of the rural people data were collected with the help of scales, focused

interviews, observations, household census, and narrations of lived meanings of activities and relations that resulted to feelings of happiness and unhappiness

- **Five point scale of Happiness and Unhappiness** – It consisted of 25 items of happiness and 15 items of unhappiness that derived from the pilot study. Feelings of Happiness and unhappiness were measured along household census schedule.
- **Household census schedule:** It was used in order to understand the type of family, landholdings, level of education of the respondent, occupation, caste, religion, and economic status in terms of below or above poverty line.
- **Interview:** Every head of the selected household is interviewed to realize some of the important activities or relations that resulted in the happy and unhappy feelings that they cannot forget in their life. On those events and relations in depth focused interviews are conducted. Besides this the respondent is allowed to narrate the events in detail and they are probed for their internal consistency.
- **Observation:** The nature of the house of the respondent and some other physical things were observed at the time of interview session.

Development of the Scale: Initially for the development of scale pilot study was conducted on 15 villagers that are household heads. These fifteen households are interviewed. Interviews in the pilot study are focused on three questions. They are:

- *1. Please mention those events or relations in your life that resulted in happy and unhappy feelings that were crucial in your life?
- *2. In general which feelings, happy or unhappy, prevailed in your life?
- *3. Kindly share some of your happy and unhappy feelings related to the current period.

After the interview of 15 heads of the household belonging to different demographic backgrounds, the obtained qualitative data are analyzed. The analysis reveals 25 items that resulted in the feelings of happiness and 15 items for unhappiness. These items of happiness and unhappiness are categorized into the following dimensions.

Dimensions of Happiness: The following dimensions of happiness can be derived from the writings of the scholars mentioned that Happiness is a psychological state of feelings. It is a consequence of fulfillment of desires related to biological, social, economic, and spiritual, cultural aspects of life. These dimensions are operationalized as:

1. **Life-Cycle Events:** This dimension of happiness refers those events which are related to the person's life-cycle. It includes items which are related to marriage, birth of a son or daughter and so on.
2. **Achievement:** Achievement means to accomplish something in life as passing academic examination, getting job, House construction, more crop productivity to purchase land victory in legal disputes etc.
3. **Social Support:** It refers to get help from friends or relatives at the time of when necessity or misfortunes or disasters comes in life. Support is in terms provided by people as sympathy, emotional or in terms of economic factors. This may also include mobility, and freedom of association, recognition (status), trust, reciprocity, privilege, power, honour and prestige.
4. **Spiritual:** Prayer, meditation, fantasy, pilgrimage, rituals and altruism like e.g. I am happy because I pray God regularly and take bath in holy rivers (Ganga). The goals are knowledge, Art and religion.
5. **Others:** It includes such items which do not come in above mentioned dimensions. For example Fantasy relates items, when enemies difficulties altruism etc.

Dimensions of Unhappiness

1. **Loss of Life:** It includes items such as death of family members or relatives.
2. **Loss of Crop Productivity or Less Crop Productivity:** It refers loss of crop due to insects attacks or drought or excessiveness of water.
3. **Ill Health:** This dimension of unhappiness covers physical or mental problem of human being. It also includes physical injuries due to accidents of a person.
4. **Break Down of Social Cohesion:** It involves items such as partition in family and disputes with neighbours or relatives.
5. **Loss of Property:** It includes items such as loss of money or crop due to any natural calamities or any reasons like fire, stealing/theft.
6. **Failure:** It refers not be successful achieving something in life like, failure in academic examination, unemployment, failure in legal disputes etc.
7. **Lack of Trust:** People feel unhappiness because friends do not provide support in miseries. They deceive in difficulties.
8. **Others:** This refers those items are not appropriate for above dimensions like- dowry in daughter's marriage when neighbor live in difficulties and soon.

So, 25 items of happiness and 15 items of unhappiness were related to above dimension. For every items 5-point scale was used in which in the case of happiness 1= very less happy, 2= less happy, 3= neutral, 4= happy, 5= strongly happy. It was similar in the condition of unhappiness 1= very less unhappy, 2= less unhappy, 3= neutral, 4= unhappy, 5= strongly unhappy.

After this, with the scale, census of the household table and instruction were added. Some questions were added for the interview [See Appendix]. Then for the validity of the scale, experts were contacted directly and they checked thoroughly and on the basis of face validity they told that scale is appropriate to perspective of study about happiness and unhappiness.

RESULTS

The obtained brief results of this study are presented in following tables.

Table No.1 Happiness and Unhappiness: Average Scores & Net balance (variations) of the participants. N=50

	No. of participants (f)	Average Score of Happiness	Average score of Unhappiness	Variations
Net balance (deviation Happy people	17	4.10	3.63	+0.47
Unhappy people	33	3.70	4.23	-0.53
Total	50	-	-	-

This above table indicates that respondents have experienced more positive scores on happiness than unhappiness in their life because net balance is positive. it means in their total life events of happiness have more contribution than unhappiness events. Out of 50 respondents 33 respondents have experienced more average score of unhappiness events than happiness in their life because net balance is negative.

Table No. 2 Dimensions of Happiness and net balance of Average Scores, N=50

Dimensions	Average Scores
Achievement	4.12
Social support	3.98
Life-cycle events	3.94
Spiritual	3.82
Others	3.20

Above table indicates that events or experiences related to achievement, social support and life cycle events are the major sources of happiness as they have higher average net balance scores followed by spiritual and others. Achievement based experiences of events in life is one of the major sources of happiness. For instance a fifty years old ,belong to general category and nuclear family,head of household narrates his source of happiness in the following words:

“एक बार मेरी फसल (धान की) खराब हो रही थी। उसमें रोग लग गया था। मेरे पास पैसा नहीं था। मेरे मित्र ने उस समय सहायता की थी जिससे मैं अभी भी उस पल को सोचकर खुश हो जाता हूँ।”

Extension of social support at the time of crisis or intended crisis also results in experience of happiness. For instance a 57 years old cultivator narrates his experience of happiness based on the extended financial support in crisis to him by his primordial relatives.

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Life cycle events like birth of son. A 60 years old cultivator belong to lineal joint family household head narrates his experience in the followings words.

“जब मेरी पहली संतान (लड़के) का जन्म हुआ तो मैं बहुत ही खुश हुआ था। लड़का वंश परम्परा को कायम रखता है, उसके होने से परिवार का अस्तित्व मिटता नहीं है तथा बुढ़ापे में या जीवन में कभी भी आपका (माता पिता का) सहयोग एवं रक्षा करता है”

Spiritual and religious activities too contributes to the happiness as narrated by a 56 years old household head belong to Brahmin family; “ जब कभी मुझे मौका मिलता है तो मैं प्रयाग गंगा मों का दर्शन करने चला जाता हूँ, वहाँ गंगा में नहाने पर मुझे अपार हर्ष खुशी होती है तथा मुझे शान्ति मिलती है। गंगा में नहाने के बाद सारे पाप मिट जाते हैं तथा शान्ति मिलती है। इसके अलावा जब कभी मैं घर पर भगवान की पूजा करता हूँ तो मुझे खुशी होती है।”

Table No. 3 Unhappiness: Dimensions and Average Scores of 50 respondents, N=50

Dimensions	Average scores
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Loss of life	4.88
Loss of crop or declined productivity	4.63
Failure in life	4.42
Loss of property	4.40
Breach of trust	4.29
Break down of social cohesion	4.00
Others	3.62
Ill health	3.33

Table no. 5 shows that loss of life is one of the major sources of unhappiness followed by Loss of crop or declined productivity, failure in life, loss of property, breach of trust and break down of social relations. Ill health is observed as one of the important dimension of unhappiness. Loss of life events leads to unhappiness which can be comprehended with the narration of 53 years old cultivator belongs to nuclear family. According to his narration:

“ मेरे जीवन में सबसे दुःख वाला क्षण तब आया जब मेरे बड़े भाई की सड़क दुर्घटना में मौत हो गयी। इस घटना से मुझे बहुत आघात लगा। घर के मालिक वही थे। खेती की पूरी जिम्मेदारी उन्ही पर थी। उनके मरने के बाद अब मुझसे अकेले खेती की अच्छे से नहीं हो पाती है। खेत में जाने की इच्छा नहीं होती है (आंखों में आंसू आ जाते हैं)। ठीक है जो नियति (भगवान) को मंजूर होता है वही होता है। सबको एक दिन इस दुनिया से जाना है। इस साश्वत नियम को ध्यान में रखकर मैं अपने दुःख को कम करने की कोशिश करता हूँ। दूसरे के दुःखों को भी देखता हूँ तथा सोचता हूँ कि हमसे ज्यादा तो उनके जीवन में दुःख है।”

Loss of crop or declined productivity is another event that causes unhappiness. A 48 years old cultivator shares his experiences in the following way;

“ सन् 2003 में 2 बीघे खेत में मैंने आलू बोया था, काफी सेवा की, मेहनत किया लेकिन पाला पड़ने से आलू की फसल बर्बाद हो गयी।”

Events related to failure in life too significantly contribute to unhappy feelings as revealed in a depth interview of 42 years old, belongs to joint family and OBC category household head.

According to him:

“ जब मैं कक्षा 10 की परीक्षा में फेल हुआ तो मुझे काफी दुःख हुआ। हालाँकि उसके अगले वर्ष मैं परीक्षा उत्तीर्ण कर गया। उसके बाद मैंने अपनी पढ़ाई जारी रखी बी0ए0 किया उसके बाद एम0ए0 किया। इसके बाद मैंने नौकरी के लिए कोशिश की लेकिन नौकरी नहीं मिली। यही मेरे दुःख का सबसे बड़ा कारण है। लेकिन अपनी आजीविका चलाने के लिए मैंने किराना की दुकान खोली जिससे परिवार का भरण पोषण हो जाता है।”

DISCUSSION

Throughout the history of human civilization, happiness has been considered the highest good and ultimate motivation for human action. Results show that the dimensions of happiness are achievement, life cycle events, social supports and spiritual. Achievement means to accomplish something in life for example passing academic examination, to get job, to purchase land etc. Life-cycle events are in terms of marriage, birth of a son or daughter and soon. Social supports refer to get help from friends or relatives at the time of necessity; it could be in terms of emotional or economic factors. Spirituality is concerned with the religion or the human spirit. This includes bathing in river Ganga, Prayer to God, pilgrimage and listening God's story.

Results show that achievement is highest scored by participants as a source of their happiness. Social support and life-cycle events are also important along with spiritual dimensions related events for the source of happiness. Achievement promotes sustainability of people's livelihood and facilitates their life easily. It provides infrastructure facilities and economic growth so people feel happiness.

Life cycle events and social support are also important because birth of a son brings security in future and social support fulfills the needs of human beings. Indirectly this is in favor of Maslow's need fulfillment theory, based on an assumed hierarchy of human needs, states that physical and security concerns must be met before desires for love, esteem and self actualization may be realized. Hence we can say that active participation or active view of happiness is important for people that means happiness can be obtained by actively searching for it and can be brought about by the satisfaction of obtaining it. (Kosaka 2006).

Spiritual dimension related events are less important in comparison to other dimensions of happiness. But Menon (1998) found spiritual factors which are the important factors for happiness in Indian context.

Results of this study are in the favour of Sahoo's (1995) study in which he found that economic affluence, professional success, positive spouse relation, children's academic attainment, promising job prospect of children and smooth social relation are happiness factors. Veenhoven's (1993) study also favor in it. Veenhoven maintains that subjective well being is caused by the satisfaction of basic, universal human needs. Results show that participants have emphasized on achievement dimensions as sources of their happiness irrespective of caste categories. Participants of OBC and SC categories have more emphasized on social support and life-cycle events as sources of their happiness whereas participants of general caste categories

have more emphasized on spiritual events for as sources of happiness. Argyle (2000) on the basis of his study concluded that in poor countries such as India, where low income threatens basic human needs more often, being relatively well off does predict greater well being. Psychologically as well as materially it is better to be high caste than low.

Results of this study refer that above poverty line participants have more emphasized on achievement related events for their sources of happiness in comparison to below poverty line. Below poverty line people emphasized more on life-cycle events and social support events as sources of happiness. Cultivators are happier with achievement, life-cycle events and spiritual events whereas govt. service and business related respondents emphasized more on achievement and social support. Illiterate and primary to middle level educated respondents emphasized as source of happiness on life-cycle events whereas more educated respondents emphasized on achievement along with other dimensions also. Social support is more important for secondary to higher secondary educated people.

Aged participants have more emphasized happiness in terms of life-cycle events, social support and spiritual factors whereas 35-50 years related participants more emphasized on achievement event. Results reveal that mostly achievement and social support related activities have more or less commonly emphasized as source of happiness by all types of families. For lineal joint family life cycle events are important as source of happiness whereas Nuclear family more emphasized on achievement events. Results show that loss of life, loss of crop productivity, breakdown of social cohesion like partition in family, loss of property and Breach of trust are the major sources of unhappiness. Loss of life is highest scored by participants; many empirical studies support these findings that major life events such as the death of a loved one, loss of property etc. are the major sources of unhappiness.

Results show that loss of life events are the common sources of unhappiness for all types of families. Break down of social cohesion is important for nuclear, sub nuclear and supplemented nuclear family as sources of unhappiness. And it is important for general caste categories respondents because they told that social cohesion restricts their livelihood sustainability. Whereas participants belong to OBC and SC categories have emphasized more on failure in life and loss of crop productivity as source of their unhappiness. SC participants also emphasized more on ill health in comparison to other caste categories. People belong to Above Poverty Line has given more priorities on loss of crop productivity along with other dimensions

of happiness. People under Below Poverty Line more emphasized on failure in life in comparison to failure in life. Cultivators and Landless laborers are unhappy due to breaching of trust in comparison to other occupations related participants. Results also show that there is little emphasis on ill health as source of unhappiness than other dimensions of unhappiness.

Results also show that 66% respondents are unhappy and 34% respondents are happy with their life. It means their net balances of unhappy people are in negative direction in other words the ratio of unhappiness events have more in their life which restrict the sustainability of their livelihood at greater extent. Participants are happy because their net balances are positive; it means they have experienced more happiness events in their life rather than unhappiness events.

Cross tabulation of net balances revealed that caste categories play an important role in happiness or unhappiness because chi-squares are significant. OBC and SC participants are unhappy in comparison to general caste categories because their net balances are negative. They have experienced loss of life, loss of crop productivity, failure in life events more. Other variables like types of families, education level, size of landholdings etc. do not have a significant role in happiness or unhappiness as per the statistical tests.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, study indicates that achievement, life cycle events, social support related events are the sources of happiness for rural people. The major unhappiness sources are like loss of life, loss of crop productivity along with failure in life, loss of property and Breach of trust. This unhappiness related events prevent the sustainability of livelihood of rural people whereas happiness events promotes. The net balances of most people are negative which show that most people have experienced unhappiness in their life.

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